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VOL. II.

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E. J. Steiglitz

ALEC'S BRIDE

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"ST. OLAVE'S," "JANITA'S CROSS,"

&c., &c.

"Then Lancelot threw abroad his armour and said—'Alas! who may trust this world?'"

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CHAPTER I.

THERE was now the new interest of Marian Govan's friendship brought into Roda's life, to mature and strengthen it. True, Roda was not much of a companion for Marian, except as her bright, fresh young spirit brought a waft of sunshine and wholesome air into that dim, and sometimes unlighted pathway, along which the fatherless girl had to tread; but Marian could do much for Roda. It was an education of the best kind to be within reach of her influence. Roda never went to that quiet old house in Ulphus Court, to spend an hour with Miss Govan, or brought her over to the Old Deanery, without feeling the better

for it. She could never say exactly how it was, but there seemed to be something in Marian Govan's voice and ways, which brought back the feeling she used to have when she was a very little child, and went with Aunt Phillis into the Cathedral ; a sort of wondering reverence, a consciousness of something all around and about her that was holy and pure, and good. She often thought, though she did not like to tell Aunt Phillis so, that it was a great deal better to go to the old house in Ulphus Court, than to go to church ; for the going to church often tired her patience very much, and did nothing but that, whereas the going to see Marian Govan, and the watching of that simple, unostentatious dutiful life, made her feel as if she, too, would like to do some good in the world, and not be living only for the sake of making herself happy and comfortable.

For she could see that it was a beautiful life, though so far apart from her own. There was such quietness and seclusion, and self-containment about it. Roda thought sometimes that the great Teacher must be dealing with Marian as Fits said He used to deal with people who were to be very useful in the world—taking them apart from others, and setting them alone, as it were, that they might grow strong and noble and helpful. Though there was a gentle-heartedness about Marian, which seemed as though it ought not to be set apart, as though it ought rather to be cherished, and sheltered, and cared for, and kept from the rough blasts of the east wind, like those seedling plants which Fits talked about. And when she saw how hard the poor girl had to toil, and how heavily the household cares pressed upon her, and how thought for others and labours for them seemed to take up all her

time ; and then looked at her own life, so cared for and watched over, so filled with light, and love, and brightness, she wondered why these things were so.

She asked Fits about it one day. Fits was her oracle in all the serious problems of life. She thought he knew more about them than even her papa or Aunt Phillis ; at any rate, he was always able to solve them to his own satisfaction, which was more than the heads of the family could do. .

Fits knew all about it. It was one of the subjects he had been studying over as he did his daily stint of work in that Old Deanery garden.

“It’s here, Miss Roda,” he said, getting into his usual conversational attitude. “The Lord’s gotten a place for everyone, and He puts us all just where we ought to be, nowhere’s else.

And what we've each on us got to do, isn't to look round about us and spy out what other folks is doing; but just to do the best we can for ourselves. You see, Miss Roda, as I've oft telled you afore—and maybe it's doing about so much in this here garden makes me study these things in my own mind, and put a meaning to 'em as other folks don't see, not being in the same line o' life—I oft thinks the Almighty deals with us same as we deals with trees, and bushes, and flowers. We set 'em where it's best for 'em to be, and keep a look out over 'em to see they've got all they want, and then expects 'em to grow. The low bushes isn't to be discontented because they can't shoot up like the lily, with a beautiful flower at top, pride of all the garden; and the lily with its crown isn't to be stuck up because it's gotten one and the tothers hasn't; because its crown isn't of its

own putting on, and their lowliness isn't no fault of theirs. They're just there, both on 'em, to do the best they can, where they can, and nowhere's else."

"Why, law, Miss Roda," continued Fits, looking up at the trees in the Old Deanery garden, "what a carryin' on there'd be in this here place if all t' trees and things was to start meddlin' with one another, and thinkin' one wasn't right 'cause it didn't do as the rest did. If t' poplar trees was to rile t' elms 'cause they didn't grow up as straight as mop-sticks, an' the elms was to go agen the poplars 'cause they didn't spread out like a green baize tree, and currant bushes was to despise theirselves because they didn't blossom same as roses, and the roses was to think they did no good because they couldn't bear fruit like the currant bushes. But it do seem to me, Miss, the

plants in a garden is often a vast sensibler nor what the folks is as takes care on 'em ; and they don't grumble—not they—because they can't be like one another, but they're content to stop where they're put, and grow as fast as they can there. And I'm thinkin', Miss Roda, it won't be till we learn to do the same that we shall be any credit to Him as planted us and set us here in this world, some on us to bud and blossom like the roses, all beauty and pleasantness, and some on us to creep along like the moss, wi' neither flowers nor fruit, doin' a lowly work, but doin' it well, if it's only to hap up a bit of ould stump, or take the ugliness out of a tumble-down wall ; and some on us spreadin' out our branches for them as is tired to come and shelter ; and some on us bearin' fruit whiles, and some, maybe, nought but bitter herbs—never taken no heed of, except

when we're wanted for medicine. Because, you see, Miss Roda, it isn't a bit o' count where we are, nor what we are, because we aren't of our own makin' nor puttin', and we shan't be dealt with at the last for being roses, nor elms, nor lowly mosses, nor bitter herbs, but only just for how we did our duty, and kept along in the tracks of His will, whether we were big or little. Leastways, that's how I look at it, though I wouldn't go for to say but what other folks may see different, and be as right as I am—maybe righter."

Then Fits took his thumbs out of his waistcoat, and went on digging over the flower-beds ready for winter, leaving Roda to ponder his remarks at her own convenience.

But if she had learned thus early to look up to Marian Govan's life as one fed from higher sources than her own, she was by no means

disposed to entertain so good an opinion of Mr. Alison's new assistant. Roda and Avery Govan could not get on at all well together. From the first, she was sensible of a kind of repulsion between them. He was very clever, and very good-looking, and very gentlemanly in his manners, with a wonderful flow of conversation, and a fine talent for making himself agreeable in general society; but she could not get to like him any better for all these brilliant qualities. He was so very unlike Alec Ianson, and that, for one thing, was enough to keep him in the back settlements of her regard. Alec was the only young man whom she knew thoroughly well, and she had got into the habit of making others stand or fall according as they could bear a comparison with him. Avery Govan could not, so he fell, whether justly or not, he must decide for himself hereafter.

He had been to the Old Deanery several times with his sister; and Aunt Phillis, who was always ready to look on the bright side of everything and everybody, gave it as her opinion that he was a very promising young man. Well, Roda thought, he might be promising, just as old Fits said his scarlet geraniums were promising; for when he set them out in the garden that summer, they promised to have almost as many flowers as leaves, and then, instead of having anything of the sort, they all came to nothing, and he had to root them up and throw them away. Perhaps Mr. Avery's promises would come to the same end. Roda rather thought they would.

She did not like people who had so very much to say, and then did so little after they had said it. Avery was always wonderfully

polite to Aunt Phillis, and made a great fuss about wanting to help her in every way that he possibly could. If he was sitting by her at tea, and the tea-pot had to be refilled, he used to say,

“Pray allow me, Miss Chickory: *do* not trouble yourself so much, I shall be so happy to help you.”

But nevertheless Aunt Phillis always *did* fill it herself, before he had got his grand speech finished. And then he would apologise, and beg her to call upon him next time she needed assistance. Just the same, if Roda was getting up to put some coal on the fire; he would bustle up from his seat and flutter round her, and profess to be so exceedingly sorry that she was putting herself to inconvenience, when he was at hand to prevent her from doing so; but whilst he was bowing and smiling, and offering

his services, Roda had got the coals put on, and was back again to her seat, feeling just as vexed with him as ever she could be. What was the use of doing all that talk, and letting other people do the work? Alec never used to behave in that way. All the time that he had staid with them, Aunt Phillis had never once had to do anything for herself that he could do for her; and though he never said, "*Do permit me, Miss Chickory,*" or, "*Pray allow me the felicity of assisting you,*" yet he did it without any such fine speechifying, and always seemed to find out, too, when people wanted helping, although he never professed such a wonderful satisfaction in doing anything for them. Roda thought Alec's way was much the best way.

Then, Avery was always talking so largely about how he should be able to help his mother

and sister when his position in Ulphusby was better established. How he should so very soon, with Mr. Alison's recommendation, succeed in getting pupils at remunerative terms, and then Marian would not need to slave over that little school of hers. A little school, he said, was such a low, common-place sort of thing. He should never think of allowing her to keep it on when once he got established in the place. All very well, Roda said to herself. Nothing better than that he should look forward to being a help to the family. Any young man who had a widowed mother, and the smallest bit of manliness, would look forward to that, though, perhaps, he might not say so much about it as Avery did. But then, she thought, he need not wait until he had got a position, to be a help to his family. He might, at any rate, take the music lessons for his sister

now, and so give her, at least, an hour's rest in a morning, instead of sitting, as she had sometimes seen him sit, reading the newspaper, whilst Marian, with a bad sick headache, was dragging little Minna Dexter through the first page of Hamilton's Exercises. And he might now and then also save her a journey into the town, by doing some trifling errand himself, and so give her the chance of getting a good long walk into the country, instead of being obliged to spend the little time she had for exercise in attending to marketing and messages in the narrow smoky streets of Ulphusby. Roda thought that it would not have been a very great stretch of self-denial, either, especially for one who was so fond of talking about his desire to make other people comfortable, if young Mr. Avery had taken off his creaking boots when Mrs. Govan had one of her trouble-

some nervous attacks, and had done his whistling at such times out of doors, or in some place where she could not be annoyed by it. She was quite sure that if Alec had a mother in delicate health, and a sister doing so much for him, he would have contrived to do a little for them ; and at the least, if he could not earn much himself, he would save as much trouble as possible to those who could.

Roda had a fair share of penetration, if her experience of things and people, whereon to exercise it, was of the scantiest. She had not lost a fraction of her childish intolerance of injustice and oppression, and though she could not now show that intolerance as heretofore—though she was too old to rush out into the Minster Close, and scatter the little boys who cheated at marbles, or with a few indignant words extinguish the cowardly young sneaks,

who were getting more out of their companions than they had any right to get, still the same impetuous spirit which stirred her to visit these iniquities upon them with such summary punishment, fired up in her when she saw selfishness of any kind practised, especially by those whose place it was to care for others, rather than to be cared for by them.

So she often felt very much disposed to "walk into" Master Avery, according to her own phrase for scolding, and tell him the plain truth—that his sister's health and spirits were being worn out of her by burdens which he ought to carry; and that the little quiet his mother could have when the needful noise of the school had been cleared away, was spoiled by his thoughtlessness, not to give it a harsher name. But then Avery had such a profoundly comfortable unconsciousness of doing anything

wrong. He was just one of those poeple who cannot be brought to see anybody's rights except their own. Once or twice her impatience had got beyond all bounds, and she had given him what she thought was a sufficiently broad hint about his sister's hard work, and his own obligation to do something towards lightening it; but he never seemed to take it in at all. Roda said you might as well try to set a cabbage on fire as try to make him blaze up into anything like manliness. He quite agreed that Marian was a real good, hard-working little sister; he was sure there was not another lassie in all Scotland who would have done so much for her family as she had done, and thought so wisely, and planned so sagaciously, and toiled with such unwearying patience to make everything pleasant for their mother. And he fully meant, as soon as he got fairly

established in Ulphusby, to make her give over working, and let her live like a lady—a thing she had never been able to do all her life yet, because she had always been wanted to help so much in the house; their mother being so delicate had thrown a good deal of extra work upon her hands, which, of course, no one but a daughter could do. All that sort of thing, however, would be altered when he once began to make his way, as he fully intended to make it before long. They should move into a larger house, and have more help, and live altogether in better style, and take a position in society very different to anything they could expect to keep up so long as she had that day-school of hers, at so much a quarter.

But as for taking a little of this grand dreaming and turning it into actual doing, that was an idea which a broader hint than

Roda's would have failed to lodge in Avery Govan's brain. Indeed, he seemed to think that his present object in life was to keep up the position of the family,—to act by his own fashionable idleness as a sort of set-off to that unassuming humility which his sister's industry appeared to imply. And certainly, if a very swellish turn-out, and an extensive variety of light-coloured gloves, and an unlimited consumption of cigars, as he strolled leisurely through the streets, after hearing the choristers practise, could have done anything in that direction, the Govans would have had a first-rate position in Ulphusby—no family in the place better.

“He is just nothing but an idle, handsome, useless stick of a fellow,” Roda used to say to herself, shaking her head with the old childish impatience, as young Govan, swinging his cane,

and puffing out clouds of fragrant smoke, came sauntering so jauntily through the Close, poor Marian labouring at home, meanwhile, over her morning pupils. "I hate him, I do! I'm sure I hate him as much as ever I can. He isn't a bit like Alec. No—as different to Alec as ever anyone can be."

But when the name of Alec came upon her lips, the angry flush went away, and there stole over her face a happy light, like the clear shining after rain.

CHAPTER II.

MARIAN GOVAN'S hands were very full now, so full that she need not lack any content which duty done, and unselfish toil cheerfully offered, could bring.

For many years these two things had put into her life most of its brightness, and it seemed yet as if they alone, and not what most girls look for in their early womanhood, should brighten it until its close. It was not a life in which all sides of her nature could come round to the sunshine. Much that a woman most earnestly seeks, and most truly values, was kept away from her. She never felt the blessed

sense of shelteredness within some human heart, stronger, wiser than her own. A daughter's natural right, that of being toiled for and cared for, was denied to her. Doing her own work of home duty faithfully, patiently, as but few women do it, there was also laid upon her the man's burden of guidance, control, foresight, responsibility. That woman has much to do and much to suffer who must be both head and heart in her home,—much to suffer when the place is empty which that head should fill, more when the place is filled by one who has neither courage, nor unselfishness, nor energy for the position which, nevertheless, he occupies as though all these were his.

Perhaps, sometimes, when the long day's work was over, and the willing hand and the thoughtful mind were no longer needed, Marian, resting in her little room—that little room where, at

evening, a slant ray of sunlight stole across from the Minster windows—had her own dreams of what life might be to her, when she should have travelled past the toil and care which seemed meted out as her portion now. Perhaps she had pleasant thoughts of a home in which all the labour of planning should not fall to her share; in which, however much work there might be for her hands, her heart might always find a sure resting-place in the love of one whose stronger will, and clearer judgment, and larger wisdom, should be to her what now she had to be to others.

For Marian was a true woman, and had it in her to prize a woman's heritage; though, if she sometimes longed and wearied for it, that longing and that weariness never had leave to spoil the gentle patience with which she took the other heritage of daily duty and daily care,

which had been appointed to her. Very early she had learned the lesson which some spent a whole long life without finding out—that the faithful doing of such work, however humble or insignificant it be, which lies clearly within reach, is the best preparation for something nobler in the future, and that only when this is well done, will guidance be given to that which lies beyond it.

In addition to Mr. Alison's grandchildren, and the three little Dexters, she had now several other pupils from the Close families, so that her mornings were well and profitably employed. Then the students had to be cared for and made comfortable, which care fell chiefly into her hands; for old Margot, the servant, who had come with Mrs. Govan from Scotland, was getting into years now, and though, like most of her humble countrywomen, a model of

faithful trustworthiness, she was not able to do quite so much in the house as her ready hands would fain have taken for their share. So that Marian, unwilling to send her away for a more active servant, and unable to afford help for her, had to take many a little household duty which might otherwise have been left for others. Besides this home work, which was likely to increase rather than diminish as the years passed on, she walked a mile and a half twice in the week to give music-lessons to some little girls on the other side of the town. They had been offered to her, though not on very remunerative terms, and she thought that whilst she had strength for the little extra labour, and whilst her mother's health did not absolutely require her to spend all her time at home, it would be better to be earning as much as she could, against the time when, perhaps, other more

pressing duties should take up all the leisure she had to give from her school.

The idea had once just crossed her mind that Avery, who had more time at his disposal now than he could spend profitably, might have used some of it in taking these lessons for her; and she had ventured to suggest something of the kind to him one day as he lay at full length on the sofa, looking over some of the chorister boys' exercises. But Avery did not see that it would be at all advisable for him to interfere with his sister's work. Not that he did not wish to help the family as much as he possibly could. He had come to Ulphusby quite with the intention of making a position for them, and he was only waiting until he got a little more experience, and had a better knowledge of his profession, to commence giving lessons and taking the entire support of the family

upon himself. Of course, he said, it was out of the question that he could take pupils on the low terms which his sister was willing to accept; and if the people would have given him a guinea or two more—even that was scarcely a respectable sum for a man to be receiving who wished to take a good stand in his profession. Marian must not think it was idleness in him, for he had quite determined to take his poor father's place and earn a living for the family; but he had been turning it over in his own mind since they came to Ulphusby, and he thought it would be much better for him to keep from teaching until he could start at once with first-rate terms, and take a position equal to the best masters in the town. It would ruin him, he said—his sister must see that—to begin with a woman's terms; for if once a fellow tied himself down in that way,

and cheapened what he had to give, it was next to impossible to make a good thing of it afterwards. He was quite sure Marian would see the reasonableness of what he said. It might seem like being unwilling to help, but in reality it was nothing of the sort; it was only reserving his strength until he could work to more purpose. A fellow who had his own way to make must look to the future, and think how it would be best to manage in reference to that; and if by keeping himself at liberty now, it would be better for the family then—why, it would be the most foolish thing in the world to go and saddle himself with a lot of teaching that would not pay him, and which he should not be able to get rid of when the time came that he might command first-class terms.

Marian listened and was convinced. It rarely needed much argument to convince her that

her own strength should be put forth to save that of other people, who were, perhaps, better able to work than herself. She thought that it really would be better, after all, for Avery to husband his talents for a year or two, and give all his spare time to study ; and then, when his name got known in Ulphusby, to come out at once as a first-class teacher, instead of creeping up little by little, beginning with such small remuneration as she was willing to accept, and gradually taking more for his fresh pupils.

And, besides, as she said to herself, a woman could do many things that would be humbling to a man. She could quite fancy that Avery, with all his gentlemanly notions and high ambition, should not like to go through the drudgery of teaching little children their notes. It was not to be expected from him. No first-

class master ever did that. His pupils were always prepared for him by a lady teacher, and then, when they were old enough to do him some sort of credit, he would bring them forward as a woman could not. Avery was very clever, and had the power to succeed—everyone acknowledged that—and when once he gave his mind to teaching, as he intended to do in the course of a year or eighteen months, he would soon be at the top of his profession. But she ought to remember that it must have been a terrible piece of self-denial to him to leave a place where he had such a good circle of acquaintance, and where his society was so much courted, and bring himself down to a humble little spot like the house they lived in now, and have to begin his studies where no one cared for him or appreciated him. She must not think that the hardship was all on

her side. *She* could not feel the change so much, because she had plenty to do at home; and besides, she never was so high-spirited as Avery, and had never got out so much into society. It made all the difference when a young man had been received into such good society as they used to mix with in Glasgow, and then had to come down to a dull, quiet little town, where his talents were not yet known and appreciated.

Indeed, as Marian pondered these things, she almost began to think that she had done a very selfish thing in wishing Avery to help her with those lessons. He had enough, poor lad! upon his mind already, without her wanting him to take any of her duties in addition. And she felt that no toil of hers could be too much, and no self-denial too great, if only he could be kept from being quite discouraged by the bitter

change that had come over their prospects. She would wait a year or two, until he got established, and could command a fair price for his abilities, and then she would not regret having spent so much toil now, and having used up her own leisure that he might have more time for study.

So she trudged patiently through snow, rain, or wind, or whatever it might be, to her music pupils on the other side of the town, and laboured away at the geography, grammar, and rudimentary accomplishments of the morning school, and looked well to the ways of her household, and did what she could to keep the home tidy and bright; whilst Avery acted as a stay to the family by always turning out very well dressed, wearing the most stylish of coats, and smoking the choicest of cigars, and getting himself spoken of by the more dandified of the

Ulphusby young men as a "regular brick," a "downright good fellow, and no mistake."

Poor Mrs. Govan knew little about the family struggles, except as Avery told her now and then that he was working like a horse at his music, and hoped in a year or two to be able to take them all out to a more genteel family residence on the outskirts of the town. It was such a nuisance, he said, being cooped up in that miserable little court—he wondered Marian had not told Miss Chickory at once that it was quite too small for them; and he was sure his mother would never have a chance to get up her health and spirits until they could go into some genteel neighbourhood, where she would have air and sunshine, and a pleasanter set of people about her than those frumpy old gentlewomen, who were always feeding their cats and canaries in the opposite windows. She must cheer up,

though, he said, for a year or two longer, and then he would alter all that sort of thing, and make their life as bright and pleasant for them as it used to be in Glasgow.

Mrs. Govan smiled very sadly when Avery talked in this way. She had no doubt he would do all he promised, and would never rest until he had worked them round again to a position equal to what they had enjoyed before. She was quite sure that nothing more would be needed than his skill and talent to retrieve the fortunes of the family ; but as for making *her* life bright and pleasant again, that would never be now. Only she did not like to tell him so, for she feared that might damp his energies, and it seemed such a pity, when he was so bright and hopeful, poor fellow, to tell him that it was all no use. He would have need enough of his cheerfulness, she thought, when she had passed

away, and there was only Marian left to care for and watch over.

For Mrs. Govan had always been weakly and ailing, with just sufficient health to keep her from being a confirmed invalid, and not enough to enable her to take an active part in the household management, which had therefore fallen into Marian's hands, as soon as she was old enough to assume it. Her husband's death was a very heavy blow to her. He was a kindly, thoughtful man, tender over her weakness, bearing patiently the many little uncomfortablenesses which her failing health necessitated in the house; and what time he could spare from his studies he gave very cheerfully to her, not putting in so large a claim for his own amusement as some other men might have done. When he was taken away, she seemed to have no heart left for battling with life any longer.

She just let Marian think and plan and contrive for the family, content to lean upon her as she had once leaned upon her husband, feeling sure that all would be done well—better, perhaps, than she could have done it herself.

She brightened up a little after they came to Ulphusby. The quiet and seclusion of the place seemed to refresh her, after the bustle of Glasgow. She was able to walk about the Close, and go to the Minster, and even sometimes to get out into the fields beyond the town; and they hoped that this great trouble might, as troubles sometimes do for people who have long been thought past all exertion, rouse her back to life again. But it was only for a little while. She soon flagged. By-and-by all the exercise she could take was a stroll up and down the little plot of grass in the centre of the courtyard, in that hour or two

when the sun shone on it. Then, as the cold weather set in, she kept to the house altogether, and at last she only came down from her own room in the middle of the day, when the children had left, and the house could be kept very quiet for her.

She had heart disease, the doctors said, and her life depended upon perfect rest, both of body and mind. If they could keep her quiet—keep her from all anxiety and worry about home matters—she might live for many years. But any sudden shock, whether of joy or sorrow, any grief preying upon her mind, would be fatal. Only as she could be guarded from all care—only as all the love and watchfulness which had been given in time past; were ever about her now, shielding her from even the fear of ill, could the life be kept within her. She might be spared to them for

many years, or the end might come at any time; and waking in the morning, they might find her gone.

Still, that home in Ulphus Court was not a sad home, still less an unhappy one. Mrs. Govan had none of the fretful discontent of ill-health about her. If she could not put much brightness into the family, she took none out of it by talking of her sorrows, and exacting pity for them from those who had already many of their own to bear. Hers was one of those gentle, passive natures, which bear alike quietly the sunshine of joy and the shadow of adversity, neither hardening under the one, nor, so long as they have any prop to lean upon, entirely giving way under the other. Marian, with her hands full of loving duties, was never other than content. So far the home had prospered in her care. Her labour

kept it from debt, and if she could not gather into it the luxuries which once seemed needful, she could at least shield it from the cold blast of poverty; and after a while she hoped, if health and strength were spared to her, more might be done than that. When they all met together in the little parlour at night, and the lamps were lighted, and the curtains drawn, Ulphusby, with all its grandeur and self-sufficient exclusiveness, had not many brighter firesides than theirs.

And even Avery was a pride and a joy to them both. There was something so bright and pleasant about him, though Marian could not help acknowledging to herself that he was rather too much of a gentleman in his notions, considering how little they had to keep up appearances with, and how little even of that little any exertion of his put into the home

fund. When she watched him set off to the Cathedral in a morning, so jaunty and well-dressed, holding up his head, and carrying himself like the best people in the place—and when she heard him whistling about the house, or cracking jokes with the two students, who often asked him into their room in an evening, she felt quite thankful that he could bear his reverses so lightly, and have so much spring and vigour left for his altered life. Many lads of his age would have been completely weighed down, and would have gone moping about the house without caring for anything or anybody. It was a great mercy that he could shake off the past, and face his future like a man. And when she heard of his being noticed by the students, or being invited to accompany them to some of the grand Close parties, where his musical talents and fine voice were beginning

to make him a welcome guest, she only thought that these things would help him in getting the position he so much needed. It was almost everything, she would say to herself, when she was tempted to think that he neglected his professional studies—it was almost everything for a young man to get himself well known before he came out into public life. When his musical talents began to be talked about, and he had more opportunity of exhibiting them, it would be a comparatively easy thing, with the advantage of Mr. Alison's recommendation, for him to establish himself as a teacher. And though, perhaps, he was away from home rather frequently in an evening now, and did not seem to care quite so much as she could have wished for seeking his happiness there, yet when she thought how little society she could get to brighten it for him, and how heavily

these long quiet evenings must sometimes pass for a young man of his bright, buoyant spirits, she could not find it in her heart to hint to him that his time might be occupied better in preparing by diligent study and practice for the position which he intended to make for himself.

So Marian comforted her own heart, and in faithfully doing what God had given her to do, she hoped that all would be well.

CHAPTER III.

THEN if Avery had his glimpses of high life amongst the grand party-giving people, and his snug little entertainments in the students' chambers, Marian had her own short spell of gaiety now and then in the shape of an evening at the Old Deanery. For the more Roda set herself against Avery's abominable selfishness, as she still persisted, in spite of Aunt Phillis's remonstrances, in calling it, the more she tried in her own simple girlish way to brighten Marian's life, and make her feel that there were other things in the world than slaving, and toiling, and teaching, and driving

the lines and spaces into idle, stupid little children. Roda remembered yet, with a thrill of instinctive terror, the fearful torments both she and her teacher endured whilst her young ideas were being taught to shoot in a musical direction. And she thought that if Marian's pupils cost her anything like the amount of worry which her own juvenile performances once inflicted upon Mr. Alison, the poor girl must surely stand in need of some rest and relaxation when the business of teaching them was over.

She was firmly convinced, too, that apart from the peculiar mental state induced by lines and spaces, Marian was in danger of being moped to death, in that exceedingly quiet court, amongst the stately widows and elderly gentlewomen, with scarcely anyone to talk to her, or tell her what was going on in the world, or make her

laugh until the tears ran down her cheeks, as Dr. Montagu could when he began some of his funny stories. And so she took it into her kind little head that the most sensible thing for her to do was to go over, at least once a week, and bring Marian to the Old Deanery ; or, if she could not succeed in doing that, to stay with her instead, and try to brighten up poor delicate Mrs. Govan with a little cheerful conversation.

Which she certainly did, most effectually. There never used to be such pleasant evenings at the old house in Ulphus Court, as when Roda brought her work, and spent an hour or two in that quiet little room, Mrs. Govan lying back in her great arm-chair by the fire, and Marian busy over some sewing-work, of which she generally had a plentiful store on hand for leisure time. Marian used to say sometimes, that

Roda's visits to Ulphus Court were just like those sweet, sunshiny days which fall unawares into late autumn and early winter, warming the stray flowers into colour and fragrance, flushing the worn-out year into the glow and freshness of summer again. Their life seemed such a different thing when a little of the overflowing brightness of her own was put into it, and when she went away, it was as though the daylight had gone, too.

Only when Avery chanced to be at home—which was not very often the case now—there was always a touch of stiffness in Roda's manners, and if she could not make an excuse for going home again very soon, she would give him to understand by her slightly dignified air—for even Roda could put on a trifling amount of dignity when the occasion required it—that he need not take the trouble to make himself agree-

able to her. She used to get more and more out of patience with him for thinking so much about himself, and letting his sister do so much that he might take off her hands. And since she had not at all got over that way of hers of speaking out her mind upon anything, whether what she had to say was pleasant or not, she used sometimes to unburden a little of her indignation to Marian.

“Marian,” she would say, “why *doesn't* your brother do something to help you? I think I should get so out of patience, if I were you. Why *don't* you ask him to——”

“Hush,” Marian would reply quietly, as though soothing an impatient child, “you cannot understand all about it. I am quite content with things as they are.”

After that Roda dare not say any more, for there was something in Marian's manner which

effectually controlled any manifestation of impatience, either towards Avery or anyone else. Roda thought it seemed as hard to rouse Marian to a sense of her own rights, as to rouse Avery to a sense of his duties. One was as slow to fire up into resentment, as the other was to fire up into anything like manliness, or brotherly honour.

What a contrast between those two girls; Roda, with all her buoyant, flashing grace, every movement so full of life, and energy, and animation, the rich overflow of health and happiness sparkling in her eyes, lending its bounding quickness to her step, its spring and music to her laugh; and Marian, with such quiet, controlled ways, her face so full of thought and care, yet with such a lofty calm brooding over it, the calm of a heart which, if not filled with hope and promise, was yet at one with the world

itself and God. Aunt Phillis used to look at them sometimes and think that if an artist wanted to paint a picture of Memory and Hope, he might have taken those two faces for his models; one seemed to be looking forward with such sunny ardour to all the sweet promise of life, while over the other lay the moveless quietude of one who sees her best in the past, not the future. Or if in the future at all, not the future which time can bring.

Roda was growing very lovely. People said she would make quite a sensation when she emerged from the seclusion of the Old Deanery into the comparative publicity of Ulphusby society. Hers was that rich, finely coloured beauty, which ripens very rapidly when once it begins to pass out of the crudeness of early girlhood. Every day seemed to dower her with some new attraction, deepening the colour on

her soft round cheek, and kindling a more brilliant light in those dark blue eyes which until now had only sparkled with childish happiness ; lending to all her ways a sweet grace of dawning womanhood, and gathering over them that veil of half-shy reserve which gives its finishing touch to a maiden's beauty.

Roda could not help knowing that she *was* beautiful, too. No girl who holds that precious gift, holds it long unconsciously. Even if no flattering words told her of it, yet she soon learned it in the unspoken homage of many an admiring glance, and in the glad, proud consciousness of power which lifts the owner of a fair face into happy queendom over others less richly dowered. True, Roda had not yet entered into the full glories of her sovereignty, some months having to elapse before her formal introduction to society gave her the right to claim her votes

in that elective monarchy of beauty which is continually changing and replacing its rulers as their charms wane, or become eclipsed by those of more favoured aspirants; but her turn would come soon, and even now some who had the opportunity were not slow in plying her with the sweet incense which those for whom the crown is destined never fail to win.

Besides, Roda's quickly ripening beauty was not her only qualification for success in the great world of society. All the people in Ulphusby knew well enough that Dr. Montagu, to say the least, was not a poor man. Anyone who had held the position of head-master in the Grammar School for twenty years, and had lived so much out of the gay world as Dr. Montagu had done during Roda's childhood, must have laid by a considerable sum, quite

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sufficient, apart from any other source, to provide his only daughter with a handsome competence when the time came that she should require it at his hands. And then Miss Chickory, who had no brothers or sisters living, and no niece except the pretty Miss Montagu, was known to be possessed of a very snug little fortune, which, together with that of the late lamented Mrs. Montagu, would descend undiminished to Roda. So that the young lady, apart from her sweet face and bewitching manners, was a desirable investment, looked at in a matrimonial point of view.

Especially desirable for any young, unbefitted clergyman, who, having a fine position in society, and not very extensive means for the sustentation thereof, might naturally be supposed to cast a prudent glance upon monetary considerations in his choice of a partner for life.

It is an established axiom of social polity—at least, it was in Ulphusby, whether or not other places are sufficiently sensible to look at the matter in that light—that a clergyman, above all other men, has the right to expect a comfortable share of this world's goods with the lady whom he takes unto himself as a wife. Because, since the ecclesiastical raiment which her husband wears, gives the object of his affections access to the most select society of the parish, even admitting her upon a footing of equality to the mansions of actual noblemen, should there chance to be such luxuries as noblemen within the parochial limits, it follows as a conclusion patent to the most illogical mind, that in return for these inestimable privileges, she should set before the donor of them an open door to all the rights and immunities which a handsome fortune can provide. This was the

first article of the social creed in Ulphusby, whose benefices were not of the richest, and the holders of them were therefore the more justified in supplementing that deficiency by a suitable matrimonial alliance.

Mrs. Dexter, whose brother, the Rev. Marcus Fabian, was curate at the fashionable ritualistic church of St. Chad's, entirely acquiesced in these opinions relative to the wedding of ecclesiastical position and large holdings in the three per cents. And it was with an eye to the possible amalgamation of Miss Montagu's reversionary interests in her papa and Miss Chickory, with the scant pecuniary means, but lofty positional advantages of her clerical brother, that she had been for the last few months gradually increasing the intimacy between herself and the Old Deanery people, intending by-and-by to open a small series of private visitings, which might give the

young people an opportunity of becoming acquainted with each other, and possibly of indulging a tenderer feeling, before such time as Miss Montagu made her formal entrance into the fellowship of fashionable life.

She knew that in the course of a few months Roda would be fairly launched into the great ocean of society. Once there, many a gaily pennoned but slightly laden cruiser would hasten to give chase to the rich argosy, and strive for the honour of convoying it into the port of matrimony. Why should not the Rev. Marcus Fabian's craft, so slenderly furnished with ballast now, that it could scarcely carry sail enough for either safety or convenience, join the pursuit? And before joining the pursuit, would it not be advisable to tack about for a little season in the neighbourhood of that sheltered haven, and examine the freight and esti-

mate the tonnage, and test the sea-worthiness of the beautiful little vessel, which, with all her fair colours floating from the top-mast, and her sails furled, was heaving to and fro there, straining her anchors, fluttering her pennons, longing to break away from her moorings, and bound into the great untried ocean of life?

For sometimes gallant cruisers, like the Rev. Marcus Fabian, sweeping the high seas in quest of something advantageous, started after a ponderously-laden prize, which, almost deck deep in the water, weighed down with its splendid wealth of merchandise, was slowly and heavily ploughing its unaccompanied way to the distant port. And then, when chase had been given, and the signal-guns fired, and the grappling irons thrown out, and terms of surrender proposed, and the huge bulky vessel safely drawn alongside, lo! the cargo was but rubbish after all, ballast of

sand or stones, anything but worthy of being towed with flying colours and firing of salutes into the port of matrimony. In other words, the shares went down, and the stock depreciated, and the markets fell, and the scrip became good for nothing, and the bulky fortune wherewith so much might have been accomplished, collapsed like rainbow bubbles that have been kept too long under their glass shade.

Marcus must not make such a misadventure as that, upon the high seas of his promotion. For since only one prize could be towed into port at a time, and that prize, if at last it turned out to be worthless, mere ballast of sand and stone, could not, once fairly grappled and surrendered, be discarded, save with great loss of the winner's honour, for a fresh pursuit, it behoved that all care should be taken, and all observations made, and all liabilities weighed, be-

fore guns were fired and chase given in this, the most critical venture of life.

For Mrs. Dexter was determined that no brother of hers should tow anything but a *bona fide* prize, well laden, and sea-worthy, into that haven at which all vessels once launched into the sea of fashionable life, would fain arrive.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was to guard against any such untoward catastrophe as had befallen other gallant cruisers, that Mrs. Dexter judiciously felt her way towards a confidential intercourse between herself and the Old Deanery people, when Roda's introduction into society became a thing of no very distant occurrence.

Miss Chickory, dear unsuspecting old lady, was easily won over to the extent of intimacy which Mrs. Dexter required for the furtherance of her plans. Anyone might secure Aunt Phillis's good graces by speaking kindly of her friends, and Mrs. Dexter had an admirable

opportunity of doing this by extolling the services which Miss Govan had rendered to her children, who had now been that lady's pupils for nearly six months.

Accordingly Mrs. Dexter took occasion to call at the Old Deanery one morning, and, after a few general remarks, she led the conversation to the very superior process of education which was pursued at the Ulphus Court House. It was really astonishing, she said, the progress the children had made during the last six months. Miss Govan had a perfectly marvellous gift in bringing her pupils forward. She seemed to make their lessons quite a pleasure to them. Indeed, dear little Blanche was in tears if she had to stay away from school on account of cold, or wet weather, or anything of that sort; and as for Percy, Mrs. Dexter declared she felt positively jealous, Miss Govan

had so completely won the child's affections. And she managed his temper so beautifully, too, he really was not like the same child that he used to be before he went to the Ulphus Court House.

And then Miss Govan's accent was so correct, and her manners so perfectly refined, and the moral principles which she instilled into the children so unexceptionable, that in spite of that little prejudice about the—the—dear, dear, what *was* the name? something, however, about dissent, Miss Chickory would remember what she referred to—which she was quite ready to confess now was a species of bigotry on her part, having been brought up herself in the Establishment, and most of the members of her family holding important preferment in it; in spite of that little prejudice, she must say Miss Govan was one of the most superior teachers

she had ever met with in the whole course of her experience. And she felt that she should never be able sufficiently to express her obligations to dear Miss Chickory for having introduced the young lady to her notice.

Because, as Mrs. Dexter went on to say, the education of children was such a very serious responsibility. It was everything to meet with some one who would attend to their accent, and manners, and morals, and all that sort of thing; as, of course, a mother could not be expected to do, with calls to make, and visitors to receive, and all the other claims of society; which, especially upon a person of good position, were so very numerous. And if she could advance Miss Govan's interests in any way by sending her fresh pupils, or recommending her to music teaching, or mentioning Mr. Avery's name amongst her friends, as she understood he wished

to establish himself in the town, it would be the greatest pleasure in the world to her to do anything of the sort. She was quite sure nothing would give her so much pleasure as to be able to do anything for dear Miss Govan.

Miss Chickory was won over at once. Her kind heart warmed towards Mrs. Dexter for taking such a friendly interest in the patient, self-denying girl, who was toiling so hard for the daily bread and daily comfort of those dear to her. Already, in imagination, she beheld Marian's little school-room crowded with the cream of Ulphusby juvenility, brought there through Mrs. Dexter's influence, and young Avery's time occupied from morning to night with pupils at seven and sixpence a lesson—Mr. Alison's terms—secured to him through the recommendation of the same all powerful friend. And having her heart so warmed towards Mrs.

Dexter, and hoping such happy results from her interests in the Ulphus Court family, she gladly accepted that lady's proposal that she and Roda should spend a quiet evening before long in company with Marian Govan and her brother at St. Ninian's Lodge.

"You know, my dear Miss Chickory," Mrs. Dexter said, "I am afraid the poor girl is very lonely. Coming to the place without any influential introductions, people have not thought it advisable to call upon the family; of course we never do in a place like this, unless strangers are well introduced. A great mistake, I am sure, in the present instance, because I have heard that Mr. Avery is such a brilliant acquisition to an evening party, and I intend to introduce them, as soon as I can, to a few of the leading people about here. I daresay they never get into society, except when you are kind

enough to ask them over to the Old Deanery ; and that, you know, although very pleasant sometimes, is not a thing that you can be always doing, under present circumstances."

And Mrs. Dexter glanced across to the bright-faced little maiden who was playing with a bit of embroidery-work on her low chair by the window ; intending to imply that Mr. Avery's visits, if too numerous, might produce unlooked for results in that direction. However, Roda was not attending to the conversation, and Miss Chickory's perceptions were as yet scarcely awakened to the dangers which were hovering around her beautiful niece. Mrs. Dexter noticed that the little inuendo fell unheeded.

That was quite in favour of her plans. If Roda's heart was untouched by the fascinations of Mr. Avery, and if Miss Chickory, dear old lady, was so unconscious of her niece's charms,

both of face and fortune, as not to suspect that they might already be an object of pursuit to young gentlemen on their promotion, there was all the more probability that her own tactics would be successful. At all events the ground was her own. No adversary was in the field as yet. No other cruiser had hove in sight to give chase to the gay little craft, so soon as it should have got upon the high seas. Neither had she, in the person of Miss Chickory, to manage one who would suspect her plans, and fence herself against them. That hint, thrown out so broadly, yet falling so harmlessly, was an admirable security for her own prospects of victory. It convinced her that, for the present, at least, she had nothing to do but go on and prosper.

“Although I am sure,” she continued, coming back to the original subject, Miss Govan’s

exceedingly secluded life, and thinking that perhaps Miss Chickory might wonder why, having sent her children to Ulphus Court for six months, and professing herself so delighted with the progress they had made, she had never thought it worth her notice before to pay their instructress the compliment of the attention she was meditating now—"I am sure I should have been delighted to see her myself at the Lodge over and over again; only you see, dear Miss Chickory, I have so few attractions in my own home, and I really did not feel that I was able to offer any inducement to a lady of such superior taste and abilities, unless I could secure you and your niece to make up for my own deficiencies in the way of entertainment. You know, dear Miss Chickory, I am *not* intellectual."

Mrs. Dexter made this last very undeniable

assertion with a gentle, pleading accent, as though to imply that if Providence had thought fit to place her in the lowest stratum of asinine stupidity, it was not so much her fault as her misfortune. And she also said it with a slight deprecatory glance at the ladies she was addressing, which seemed to intimate that if the same disposing Providence had blessed them with the capacities of something like reasonable beings, they were not on that account to boast themselves over their less-gifted neighbours. Because the same power which had bestowed the capacity, could also recall it, and place its former owner in as profound a depth of humiliation as that from which she herself looked up now. All this was contained in the expression of Mrs. Dexter's face as she said to her dear friend of the Old Deanery, "You know, Miss Chickory, I'm *not* intellectual."

Aunt Phillis was rather surprised. She had never credited herself with an unusual amount of mental superiority, and, so far as she could judge, Roda had shown no indications as yet of large intellectual gifts. Neither did Marian's qualifications appear to place her upon an eminence to which Mrs. Dexter's newly-acquired humility could not very comfortably look up. However, if the deceased Canon's widow really did feel herself unequal to the task of suitably entertaining the daughter of the U. P. minister, Aunt Phillis was willing to come to the rescue. So she said that it would give her great pleasure to meet Miss Govan at St. Ninian's Lodge, and that Roda should come too, though she had not yet begun to visit in general society. But she could not help gently endeavouring to raise Mrs. Dexter from that painful sense of inferiority which had so unexpectedly come upon

her, and representing to her that she was not, after all, perfectly unqualified to entertain her own guests. Mrs. Dexter, however, was not to be so raised.

“No, Miss Chickory, don’t flatter me. I’m not intellectual, I’m not indeed. And I do assure you, I never feel my own deficiencies so painfully as when I come into contact with such really superior people as yourself and Miss Govan. But then, you know, as I say to myself, there are diversities of gifts. People are not all alike.”

Roda, who did happen to be listening now, thought of Alec and young Govan, and gave a hearty mental assent to that proposition.

“People are not all alike, dear Miss Chickory, and so those who have brilliant gifts ought to bear with the infirmities of the weak. And that was why I thought that if I could secure you

and Roda, I might venture to ask Miss Govan over some evening, without feeling that it would be so great an infliction upon her patience, as if I had to sustain the conversation alone. Of course I am aware that it is a great favour for you to allow Roda to join us, as she has not yet begun to go out, but I assure you it will be the very quietest little evening—not a soul but yourselves and the Ulphus Court people, unless perhaps my brother should chance to look in as he comes home from vespers—he sometimes does, as he knows I am generally alone in an evening. So I may hope for you, dear Roda, may I?”

“Dear Roda” said she should be very glad to come, if her aunt would allow her. For indeed the Old Deanery was a very quiet place, and she got rather tired sometimes of seeing none but grown-up people, having no young

girls like herself with whom she could laugh and joke, and perhaps get a stray romp sometimes, a luxury for which she had not quite lost all relish, even yet. And though there was not much chance of a romp at St. Ninian's Lodge, Marian Govan not caring much for that sort of thing, still there were the children, who, as it was to be such a very quiet evening, not at all ceremonious, might perhaps be allowed to come into the room; and Roda knew she could always get plenty of fun out of children. She had no doubt she should enjoy the evening very much.

“It is so very kind of you to help me in this way,” murmured Mrs. Dexter, as, with a sweet smile and a wave of her hand, she moved away out of the Old Deanery drawing-room. “I should have asked Miss Govan weeks and weeks ago, if I had only been able to summon up courage enough to get you to join her. But

you know, I'm so very simple. I really never know how to get on with these superior people. I do so regret sometimes that I'm not intellectual. You don't *know* how I regret not being intellectual."

And then Mrs. Dexter said good morning, having arranged that Miss Chickory and Roda should spend the following Monday evening at St. Ninian's Lodge.

She took an early opportunity, after that, of calling upon Miss Govan, and securing her company for the same evening, though it was not needful, that young lady playing a very minor part in the Lodge tactics, to ply her quite so plentifully with the sweet incense of flattery, or to impress upon her the great honour she would confer by bending her superior mental abilities to the level of Mrs. Dexter's painfully humble attainments. Indeed, Mr.

Fabian's sister only said that, as she was expecting Miss Chickory and her niece to take tea, and as she knew the Old Deanery people and Miss Govan were friendly, she thought she might perhaps enjoy spending a few hours with them, quite in a friendly way.

"No ceremony at all, Miss Govan," said the Canon's widow, with a slightly patronising air—"just a friend or two in a very quiet way. You know it is not the season for anything but that, now. I never give parties in the summer, because nearly all the best people are away then. It is impossible to get anyone worth having in the summer, and so I just see my friends quietly, you know."

Marian was not largely gifted with self-esteem, otherwise she might have resented the slight implied in these words, and given her high and mighty patroness to understand that

she would waive the honour of her hospitality until such times as it could be shared with some one who *was* "worth having." When the U. P. minister's daughter knew that a slight was intended, she could put it from her with as much dignity as anyone ; but the fine humility of her nature, and its perfect freedom from meanness or double dealing, made her slow to suspect these things in others. So that at times her very unconsciousness saved her from wounds over which more sensitive vanity would have chafed and fretted in secret.

She was glad, for her brother's sake rather than her own, that this trifling attention should have been paid to them. It was very important that he should have access to good society for the purpose of getting himself known in the town. She had heard, too, through Miss Chickory, of Mrs. Dexter's good wishes ex-

pressed for her own and her brother's success, and perhaps, like that hopeful old lady, she hailed this admittance into one of the goodliest of the Close families as a harbinger of future patronage, when he should be in a position to avail himself of it. At any rate, he would have a much better chance of getting forward if his talents were discovered and appreciated in the best private circles of the place.

So she accepted the invitation. And now it only remained for the Rev. Marcus Fabian, like a wise captain, to cruise round about this full-laden vessel, which, with all its gaily-coloured flags floating at the mast-head, heaved at anchor in the quiet haven ; to note how much freight it bore, and of what sort,—to find out what master laid its keel, what workmen wrought its ribs of steel ; in what a forge, and what a heat, were shaped the anchors of its

hope ; or, to speak less figuratively, in what form of debenture or scrip they were moulded, and with what security for permanence and good working power. That, being satisfied upon all these points, and knowing well the sea-worthiness of the bonnie vessel, he might, when the stays were thrust away, and she had bounded into the embrace of her native element, give chase, and finally convoy her, with all her rich freight, into the port of connubial safety.

CHAPTER V.

RODA enjoyed her evening at St. Ninian's Lodge very much, though not exactly in the way she had anticipated, there being no romping with the children, or getting fun out of them, or anything of that sort. Something very much better—more amusing than that, as Roda said to herself when she came home.

It was a very quiet evening, as Mrs. Dexter had promised it should be. The only other invited guests were Miss Govan and Avery, who made himself so very agreeable, and played and sang so delightfully, that Mrs. Dexter quite regretted she had not a whole room full of com-

pany to hear him. Mrs. Dexter's bearing towards the Ulphus Court people was wonderfully different when Miss Chickory was near enough to take note of it. She was all kindness and good will now. It was so *very* obliging of Mr. Avery to have left his professional studies and come over to such a very quiet little evening; but she hoped that the next time he paid a visit to St. Ninian's Lodge, she should be able to secure some of her choicest friends to meet him. It was really a shame for such music as his to be wasted upon just two or three people. She was quite sure he had only to be known in Ulphusby to command a much higher position than Mr. Alison had ever occupied. Mr. Alison's talents, though very creditable for a provincial town, were absolutely nothing compared with those of his young assistant, and Mrs. Dexter only wondered that with such

abilities he should be willing to go through the drudgery of teaching little chorister boys their singing lessons. It was so very unsuitable for him; he ought to be doing something so much more brilliant than that.

Indeed, Mrs. Dexter gave it as her opinion that Mr. Govan ought not to be content with the provinces at all. He ought to aspire to something more advanced. He ought to go to London or Paris, where she was quite sure he would soon take his position with the leading members of the musical world. It was simply ridiculous that he should content himself with the very trifling distinction he could obtain in a second-rate place like Ulphusby. It was a mere waste of time for him to settle down there and waste his time over ordinary pupils, or to limit his ambition to such a position as Mr. Alison's, which, though very respectable for a

person of such abilities as the Minster organist possessed, was yet utterly inadequate to the requirements of a man of genius—*utterly* inadequate, Mrs. Dexter repeated.

Mr. Govan listened with the complacent *non-chalance* of conscious superiority, and promised to take the subject into consideration. Mrs. Dexter's suggestion was not the first which had been made to him. His own vanity had hinted for some time past that Ulphusby was too circumscribed a field for the display of his talents, and it was very flattering to have this lurking notion justified by a woman of fashion and position like Mrs. Dexter. He had never mentioned the subject to his sister yet, but he thought the time had come now when he might venture upon it. Ulphusby was an awfully slow place, he said to himself, for a young fellow who had any sort of pluck. He was about tired of its

stupidity. He had almost decided, even if Mrs. Dexter had said nothing about it, to relinquish his position under Mr. Alison, and try his hand in London, where there was so much more scope for a man of genius to make his way.

Perhaps he might be a year or two longer in getting afloat, and rendering himself independent of the money his sister earned; to say nothing of being a stay to the family, as, of course, he intended to be at some future period, and saving Marian from the need of so much toil. But then, in the long run, he should be able to help them more effectually. It would be such a fine thing for him to get himself established in London; so much better, even if he waited a little longer for first-rate terms, than plodding along as a teacher in Ulphusby. Besides, a fellow must always be willing to look two or three years ahead when he wants

to make a good start in life, and not mind a little present sacrifice, if he sees the way clear before him. It would not make so very much difference to Marian either, if she did keep her school on a year or two longer, until he began to make a paying concern of his teaching. He should not cost so very much more in London than he did in Ulphusby, even supposing he had to be dependent upon her a little longer. And really, after all, the school was not such a great toil. She seemed to manage it easily enough. He did not think it was half so bad as teasing every day over those stupid chorister boys, and dragging them through their thorough bass studies. And as for the music-lessons which she gave on the other side of the town, why, they only afforded her a pleasant walk twice a week, just the sort of exercise she needed, after sitting in the house all the morn-

ing with her pupils. On the whole, he thought she had a very comfortable life of it, and he did not see why she should mind so very much if he did put off beginning to give lessons for a year or two longer, until he got himself established in London for a permanency. But we are travelling far away from St. Ninian's Lodge, and Mrs. Dexter's quiet little evening.

Of course the Rev. Marcus Fabian was there. He looked in by accident as he was returning from service at St. Chad's, and was persuaded by his sister to put off his over-coat, and sit an hour or two with them, to hear Mr. Govan's church music, she said. Mr. Govan's style of playing church music was so excessively refined. She would give almost anything if they could secure him for St. Chad's, it would be such an advantage to the daily services. Marcus must

not think of running away from them, until he had heard Mr. Govan go through a few of the new chants, they were so sweetly pretty; she should never be able to rest until they had them at St. Chad's.

So Marcus staid, and managed to make himself very agreeable for the rest of the evening. Whilst apparently listening to the new style of church music, too, he made some important observations respecting the pretty little craft which was so soon to be launched. Certainly she was the most trim-built, elegantly finished piece of workmanship that had set sail for a long time; with the daintiest figure-head he had ever seen, and the bravest colours flying from the masts, and the snowiest canvas that ever gleamed in sunshine. But a vessel might carry all these, and yet not be worth the risk of capture. He would like to convoy something

more valuable than a dainty figure-head, and a bright-coloured pennon, and a snowy expanse of canvas into that port from which there was no returning any more for fresh prizes, when once the dues had been paid, and the docks entered, and the anchors cast. He must know what cargo the little craft carried, and whether it was well packed, and safely insured, before he claimed the privilege of towing it into port at all.

That must be done at some future opportunity. Still there was no harm, even now, in cruising about and keeping a general look-out. And it was the very gentlemanly, agreeable way in which Marcus Fabian contrived to do this, and not any romping, or laughing, or picking of fun out of the three little Dexters, which made Roda say, when they came home from St. Ninian's Lodge that night,

“Oh, Aunt Phillis! what a pleasant evening we have had! I haven't enjoyed anything so much for ever so long.”

Perhaps, too, it was the innocently frank, girlish manner in which she allowed this pleasure to ray out in bright smiles and happy looks towards those who gave it, that made Mrs. Dexter say, when the quiet little evening was over, and her brother was putting on his overcoat to go away,

“Well, Marcus, I think you have done very well for a beginning; you have only to follow up your advantage judiciously, and the prize is yours.”

Little Roda Montagu had all the elements of a downright flirt in her nature, excepting one—namely, the desire to bring men captive to her feet, and then humble them by telling them it was no use kneeling there, for she had nothing

to give them in return for their prostration. An exception which apparently amounts to the same thing as saying that she was a bird of Paradise without the feathers, or a rose without any of the rosy-coloured leaves which make up the flower. But the truth was that Roda loved to feel herself admired. All the grace and sparkle and vivacity of her nature came out with double brilliance when she felt that people were looking at her with loving, appreciating eyes. Still more she rejoiced to feel that she could give pleasure to others. And if sometimes, in the years to come, it should happen, as was indeed likely enough, that in putting forth all her happy young brightness to give that pleasure, she should create in those to whom she gave it a longing for something more—yes, and even unconsciously delude them into the belief that she was giving that something—still, it was not

her fault, or, if it was her fault, it was not her intention. It was only the goodness of her little heart, trying to scatter brightness all around. And if people picked up hot, burning coals, where she only intended to scatter harmless sparks, she was not to be blamed if they hurt themselves. They might have let the pretty fireworks alone, and been content to look, instead of touching. Or, as the little pet kitten may very justly say of the child who gets its hands scratched by something unsuspected hidden underneath those soft, white, velvet paws, it was not that the sharp talons scratched, but that the hand was too quickly snatched away when the soft little paw was laid upon it. The hand should have been kept still, and then no smarting wound would have told of innocent playfulness carried too far.

It was quite a new thing to Roda, this sweet

incense of attention which she felt so gently wafted towards her from the Rev. Marcus Fabian. He was a man who, in the exercise of his accustomed functions, had had a great deal to do with young ladies. He knew how to approach them with delicate little side winds of compliment, so much more effective upon the general feminine sensibility than straightforward gusts of flattery, which show too plainly the artificial source whence they come. He knew well enough that many who would be utterly disgusted by a huge dab of praise, dropped by some rough, unskilful hand, were most keenly alive to little touches of admiration, judiciously allowed to drop here and there as it were by accident, just as rosy-tinted leaves flutter from the apple-trees in April and May, or as the over-ripe peaches rustle from the garden wall, and gently roll to your feet, almost asking you

to pick them up, and let their downy softness touch your lips. Mr. Fabian was very popular amongst the ladies, especially the young ladies, of St. Chad's congregation—not so much on account of his unexceptionable vestments, the splendour of his chasubles, the exceeding richness of his stoles and maniples, the sweetness of his intonations, and the passing elegance of his genuflexions, although of course these things would have been sufficient in themselves to render him irresistible to even the least susceptible nature; but chiefly by reason of his winning manners, the exquisite perception with which he could enter into and sympathise with all their little weaknesses and peculiarities and shifting mental states. He was a special favourite with that class of young ladies who are fond of making confidants of their clergymen, young ladies who could cast themselves upon his

affections, with the sweetly pleaded—"You know I'm not intellectual, Mr. Fabian—I'm only very weak and simple," and then crave the benefit of his spiritual direction, rewarding him for it by no end of idolatry and adulation, which frequently broke out into the more tangible form of embroidered stoles, or gorgeous chasubles, or elaborate girdles for his eucharistic vestments.

And, to speak the truth, most of the young ladies who did the movements so beautifully at primes, nones, and vespers, and embroidered priestly raiment for a consideration of delicate flattery and spiritual direction from the handsome young curate, were quite justified in casting themselves upon any affection he might have to bestow, under the pretext of weakness and simplicity. There *were* faithful, noble souls amongst the worshippers at St. Chad's,

women of Marian Govan's type, whose lives were full of mercy and good works, who discerned in all mystic rite and ceremony, and gorgeous array of ecclesiasticism, the faint symbols of heavenly truths, whose exceeding beauty and preciousness even these could but dimly shadow forth; and who looked beyond them to that inner spiritual meaning without which they were only as the richly wrought vestment of a body from which the living soul has fled. But these were not the members of his congregation who cast themselves upon Mr. Fabian's sympathies, or supplied the flowers for his altar on high days and holidays. These were to be found in the homes of the poor and needy, whither they had gone with many a sweet word of comfort, many a dole of womanly charity, to bind up the broken-hearted, to bring back the wanderer, to minister to the suffering, to teach

the ignorant. There, where the true spirit of their religion could best live itself out, they were to be found, and not in luxuriously furnished drawing-rooms, embroidering maniples, and elaborating stoles, and in various other ways commending themselves to the affections of the under-shepherd of the fashionable church of St. Chad's.

Mr. Fabian soon found that Roda was neither very accessible nor remarkably intelligent on the subject of ritualism. She had but a very vague idea of even the most essential of the vestments, and was painfully ignorant of the colours proper for holy days. She did manage to display a little more interest, though, when he began to talk about the saints and martyrs, whose deeds of noble heroism she knew so well; but even in that department she got considerably mystified when Mr. Fabian talked so much

about types and symbols, and shadowings forth of spiritual truths in their various doings and sufferings. She had never looked for anything of that sort in them. She had read of them as one reads the sweet stories of fairy-land, asking for no under meaning, seeking out no symbolisms, but only admiring, with far-off reverence, the courage which could dare so much, and the love which could endure so patiently. It was pleasanter to think of them so still, to keep them shrined round with that dim haze of wonderment and awe, not to have them mixed up with Mr. Fabian's unintelligible mass of information about the colours that belonged to them, and the hoods that ought to be worn on the days when their doings were celebrated, and the mystical trials of the holy church which were symbolised in their sufferings and victories, and the ecstatic manifestations vouchsafed to

them. That was quite too grand for Roda. It was a kind of knowledge she could not by any means attain unto.

It was a relief to her when Mr. Fabian got away from the saints and martyrs, and drifted into secularities. Then Mr. Govan's performances led the way to a conversation on music in general, a subject on which she felt herself better able to launch forth, because she had heard enough of it to take an interest in what was going forward in the musical world, and knew as much about the new operas and oratorios as most girls of her age, although she had never had the chance of hearing them yet. Then, too, it was very pleasant to be listened to with such attention as Mr. Fabian paid to her whenever she made any remark, or passed any opinion upon Mr. Govan's playing; and to have her criticisms confirmed, and her judgment

complimented, and her taste extolled as being perfect, especially in church music, of which Mr. Fabian said she was the only young lady whom he had heard to speak with any amount of intelligence or cultivated perception. Mr. Fabian had said the same thing at least half a dozen times, to as many young ladies, on as many separate occasions; but as Roda did not know that, she appreciated the remark as highly as though she was the first person to whom it had been addressed.

Indeed, Roda thought it was almost as pleasant, though, to be sure, in a very different way, talking to Mr. Fabian as talking to Alec. Because, though Mr. Fabian was not half so bright, funny, and genial as Alec, still he never contradicted her, or put her down as Alec used so often to do, or told her she was a little goose, and knew nothing about anything,

when she happened to advance a remark that was not quite correct. And then Mr. Fabian scattered such very pretty compliments over his conversation—not downright flattery, because that was as bad as people thrusting a spoonful of treacle into your mouth—but delicate hints and observations, which were only just intended for herself, and which, spoken in that low, tender voice, were so very much more precious than if every one in the room had been able to hear them. And once, when she happened to take up a number of “London Society,” which was lying on the table, and looked at the frontispiece, entitled, “Types of English Beauty,” Mr. Fabian had taken occasion to say that, in *some* society he could mention there would be no need of a picture to recall *his* type of English beauty. Roda knew very well what he meant. Of course he meant

that *she* was his type of beauty, and she thought it was a very pretty speech for him to make. Because, although many an admiring glance, cast towards her when she happened to go with Aunt Phillis for a walk, or to afternoon service at the Minster, and many a spare moment spent since Alec went away in sitting before the big old-fashioned mirror in her own room, had convinced her that she was a great deal better-looking than most other girls, still it was anything but unacceptable to have that fact impressed upon her by the graceful compliments which Mr. Fabian had such skill in paying.

Perhaps Roda would have valued these compliments still more highly by-and-by, had she known that half the young ladies in the St. Chad's congregation would have given almost any amount of time and trouble in the em-

broidering of vestments and slippers if they could only have had such pretty things said to them by the handsome curate, whose ministrations they attended so diligently. But Roda had not yet got to that stage of spitefulness when a girl likes to have compliments paid to her simply because it vexes other girls to hear them paid. Mr. Fabian's pretty speeches were the more grateful to her because none other heard them. There was not a bit of triumph or exultant vanity in her little heart as she listened to them ; only innocent delight to feel herself admired and flattered. Perhaps the time might come when she would prize them for being spoken in the hearing of other less favoured aspirants to Mr. Fabian's preference, and when they might be all the sweeter to her because every syllable of them was like a little pin-prick to some one else who thought that she

had a better right to the hearing of them than Roda. If Dr. Montagu's beautiful daughter passed many more years in fashionable society without gathering up a little of this dainty spitefulness, without learning to prize the flatteries she received, not so much for their own intrinsic sweetness, as because that sweetness gave a touch of bitterness to the hearts of others who stood by, unflattered and uncaressed, she would be a very enviable young lady.

However, such thoughts as these had never entered into her mind. She only knew that it was very much pleasanter to be talked to as Mr. Fabian was talking to her now than to be playing with the little Dexters, or picking fun with Jeff and Lily in the Old Deanery garden. She thought she should never care much for that sort of thing any more, except when she had nothing else to do. She was

beginning to long, as she had never longed before, for the time, not very far off now—only about six months—when she should actually come out into society, and have as much of this sort of thing as ever she liked, only in a much more brilliant form than she was having it at present. For when she was really in society, she should go to balls and evening parties in a white dress with a low body, and lots of beautiful trimmings about it, and pearl sprays in her hair, which would look so pretty against the dark curls; instead of just simply going out to tea in a high muslin frock, with long sleeves that quite hid her round white arms, and the pretty fall of her shoulders. And if, when she only had her stupid old muslin frock on, with not a bow or bit of trimming of any sort about it, and nothing to make her look prettier than usual, people paid her so much

attention, and said such flattering things to her, and seemed to be so very pleased with her, and talked about her being a type of beauty, and other things of that sort, what would they not say when she was all beautifully and splendidly dressed, like a real young lady in a fashion-book, or in one of those grand frontispieces to "London Society." What a very, *very* happy thing life must be when people really did get old enough to go to parties, and have such flattering speeches made to them every night, as she was now listening to for almost the first time. Indeed, quite the first time, for Alec never used to talk to her in this way.

But you need not think that little Roda Montagu is growing up shallow or worldly, because, when Marcus Fabian says a few sweet things to her, cruises round the pretty vessel, to admire its dainty figure-head, and snowy

canvas, and floating pennons, before making more serious inquiries as to the cargo and terms of surrender, her face brightens up, and she thinks how grand it will be to have such things said to her by-and-by, amidst the perfume and decorations of a fashionable ball-room. And said to her, too, with so very much more earnestness, because, then, instead of this stupid old frock, she will wear a real young lady's white dress, with no end of bows and trimmings about it, and pearl sprays in her hair, and white kid gloves, and perhaps a jewelled fan, or a beautiful bouquet from old Fitts's choicest geraniums. These thoughts do not sink so very far into her heart, after all. They are but like the premature buds and flowers which come out with very early spring sunshine, and then get shaken off and blown away, having given neither perfume nor beauty to the plant that bore them. The

sweet flowers are there still, their leaves all folded up, surely and safely, until the warm breath of summer comes. The wind that shakes off the early buds will not touch them ; the flickering April sun will not lure them from their leafy shelter. They will wait until the year grows bright and loving, until June's blue skies look down upon them, and summer's long golden days win from them all their sweet store of colour and beauty.

CHAPTER VI.

AND so the stream of time rolled on through the quiet cathedral town of Ulphusby for many weeks, nothing very special happening to mark its course, no very startling events rousing the inhabitants from the peaceful tenour of their way. Winter was over and gone. The time of the singing of birds had come again. The old elm-trees in the Close put out their tender little white buds, just as they had put them out for the last two hundred years, and then, as the warm sun kissed them, and the soft west winds began to chase away those cold eastern blasts from Ulphusby moors, the young leaves crept

forth, timidly at first, like little children looking out into the great world where so many winds will have to blow upon them, and so many storms to beat, but still gradually unfolding, day by day spreading out a softer mist of colour over the old black branches, no one taking any notice of them, or remembering that the young life had begun to stir within them, until one very bright sunny morning they seemed all at once to quiver and flutter into one glorious burst of greenery, and the people, looking up, said,

“Why, the Close elm-trees are in full leaf—summer is here!”

So it was, and the birds were singing, and the jackdaws discoursing eloquent music on the pinnacles of the Cathedral; and the flowers in the Old Deanery garden were breaking out every morning into a brighter flush of colour and

sweetness, which made the little children loiter for very joyful surprise as they passed those stone-pillared gates, and peeped into the wilderness of beauty over which they kept watch and ward.

Then the hot July days came, when Fitts had to put up shelter of matting between his seedling balsams and the scorching noontide heat. And the leaves began to drop at intervals, one by one, one by one, slowly and circumspectly. Just as they were dropping last year at this time, when Roda, with her apron full of flowers, came into the dining-room, and seeing a stranger sitting there, said to him—

“I don’t know who you are.”

How often Roda used to laugh at herself now, when she thought of that Thursday morning. How they two had stood looking at each other, she with her black apron stuffed out into an ungainly bundle before her, and such an uncom-

fortable consciousness of appearing, as Malala said, "not a bit like a Christian;" he, with his Canadian dress and odd black valise and remarkably shaped cap, presenting altogether such a contrast to the primly got-up inhabitants of Ulphusby. And how well they had got to know each other after that; and what happy, happy days those used to be, in spite of the teasing, and in spite of all the foolish things she said sometimes about wishing he had never come to see them, and hating him, and that sort of nonsense! How stupid it was of her to say them! For life would have been such a different thing to her if he *had* never come—if she had never seen him, or known anything about him! And what a dreary thing it would be now, supposing he never came back again from that Frankfort college, to stay with them! If something happened—if some of his people at home died, and

he was obliged to go right back to Canada, without even coming to see them at all! Or if he was to die himself, and there was to be no Alec in the world!

No Alec! Roda could not picture to herself what a state of things that would be. It was almost like trying to fancy the world without her papa or Aunt Phillis. For Alec seemed just as much mixed up with her life now, and belonged to it as naturally as even these two; and she could just as soon fancy either of them taken out of it, as for him to give over having the place in her thoughts which he had fallen into so naturally and pleasantly ever since that happy July time when he first came to stay with them.

He had been away now a year, all but two months; and he was only to be away a year and a half altogether. There was more than half of

the time done with already. In eight months more, when winter had come and gone again—when the snowdrops had begun to thrust up their white heads on the grass plot, and little streaks of gold had come where Fits planted the crocus bulbs, she would be able to say—“Alec is coming back.”

She said it over to herself now, just to try how pleasantly it sounded—

“Alec is coming back.”

And then she began to picture to herself how it would be when he really *was* coming back. Of course she would be a young lady then, out in society, not just a sort of school-girl with high frocks and long sleeves, and nothing about her to make her look pretty, as she used to be when he came before. And she thought how nice it would be if he happened to arrive unexpectedly some night, when she was going to a

party. And if, as he came in—not of course expecting to see her looking at all different to what she looked a year and a half before—she should just be coming down the stairs with a white net dress on, flowing about like a cloud behind her, and pearl sprays in her hair, and a very beautiful bouquet in her hand, to give colour and brightness to all the rest. What fun it would be, and how he would look at her, and how she would pretend to be very unconscious, until perhaps he would say to her, as she said to him once—

“I don’t know who you are.”

And then she would burst out laughing, and say—

“Why, I’m Roda!”

And then——Well, then, perhaps, he would stoop down and kiss her on that same cheek which no other lips but his had touched since

he went away. That is, if no one happened to be anywhere about. Of course, if her papa or Aunt Phillis was there, or one of the servants, they would only shake hands with each other, and say how glad they were to see each other again, or something ordinary of that sort; and then he would settle down in the dining-room or the library, and begin to tell them all about everything. Oh! how glorious it would be! Only it would not be at all pleasant to have to go away to the party after that. There would be very little enjoyment in going to a party, and dancing, and being talked to, and flattered, and made ever so much of, when all the time she might be listening to Alec at home, and having him look at her, and smile upon her, and perhaps begin to tease her in just the dear, old, pleasant way. Perhaps it would be better for her to change her castle in the air a little,

and be returning from a party instead of setting out to one. And then she would picture to herself his look of wonder and delight as she stepped into the room in all the splendour of her ball attire, with her bouquet, and her fan, and her pearl sprays, and her beautiful white dress fluttering about her; oh! how very different from the little frumpy girl that he remembered a year and a half ago, with her dowdy frock and black stuff apron, and her hair just tied up together anyhow. If he called her a dear bonnie little thing then, what *would* he call her now?

Roda used very often to think such thoughts as these as she was arranging her beautiful black hair before the mirror in her own room, winding it round and round her fingers, and then watching it uncoil, and stray away in such glossy tendrils over her white neck and shoulders. She knew that plenty of the Ulphusby

young ladies would gladly have given half their fortunes for hair that curled naturally like hers, and for a neck and shoulders so fair, and for rosy lips that used to part to show such white, even little teeth as she had. She did not need to wait until she was in society to become abundantly conscious of her advantages in these respects, or to find out the power which her beauty gave her over others. She learned a little of it from Mr. Avery Govan's admiring glances, though she did not care a bit for *them*, because he was such a selfish, stuck-up fellow, letting his sister slave along for him, while he lounged about with a cigar in his mouth, and light kid gloves on ; she could scarcely bear even to speak civilly to him. He might say pretty things if he liked, and look expressively, but nothing that he thought would make any difference to her. She had learned still more of it

from Mr. Fabian, who used to come in sometimes now to see her papa, and play chess with him, and used so very often to be talking about stocks and shares, and all that sort of thing. She did not know that clergymen ever had anything to do with stocks and shares, but then he might be going to invest some money for his sister, or for somebody belonging to him, because he seemed so very anxious to know the prices of things, and what were the most profitable investments, and how her papa had found different lines and companies pay.

He never talked to her, though, about shares and stocks; if he had, she should very soon have told him that she knew less about them than about the colours proper to be worn on saints' days or festivals. But he always had something graceful and pretty to say—something which made her feel that he was admiring her, even

though he did not say it straight out. And just so far as it was pleasant to be admired, just so far Roda enjoyed Mr. Fabian's visits to the Old Deanery, and the elegant compliments which he took occasion to pay to her on every available opportunity. She never troubled herself to think what they might lead to, or whether he had any other object in giving than she had in receiving them—pleasant, harmless amusement. It was very nice to be flattered in that delicate, half-imperceptible manner. If Mr. Fabian enjoyed it too, so much the better. And she thought he must enjoy it, or he would not do it so often.

Meanwhile life was wearing away quietly as ever in the Ulphus Court house, where Marian still toiled patiently on with her pupils, and, by much care and thought and economy, kept the little household out of debt.

That did need much care now. Mrs. Govan's failing health required constant medical attendance, which, as Marian feared from her past experience in doctors' bills, would make a heavy pull, at the close of the year, upon their scanty resources. One of the students had left them, too, his college course being completed, and the other would only remain a few weeks longer. She had advertised for others, but as yet no applications had been made, although it was the time when such young men as could not be accommodated in the college buildings generally began to make inquiry for apartments. Her school kept up tolerably well, and her music teaching brought in a scanty pittance, enough to cover the very moderate expenses of her dress; but still, with all her care and economy, she could scarcely manage to keep house

and pay the rent, and have a little laid by for the doctor's bill out of eighty or ninety pounds a year, which, including their own income, and the proceeds of her school, was all she would have to depend upon if the students failed them.

They had now been settled at Ulphusby nearly a year, the time that was fixed for Avery to spend in exclusive attention to his studies. With all her love for her brother, and with all her willingness to extenuate his little shortcomings, Marian was sometimes obliged to acknowledge to herself, though she never hinted anything of the kind to their mother, that his studies had not been very diligently attended to, and that he had very little to show in the shape of real progress for all the leisure which had been secured to him at such expense of her own.

When he had had this year of preparation, he was to commence teaching in earnest. So they had agreed when he put himself under Mr. Alison's care, and Mr. Alison had promised to help him in securing pupils, if at the end of the time he was qualified to take anything like a respectable position in his profession. Mr. Alison had not expressed himself as entirely satisfied with his young assistant, but still he had introduced him already to one or two pupils, for whom he was to have much better terms than Marian got for her teaching, though not yet reaching the ideal seven and sixpence, or half a guinea, which he hoped to get when he was a first-rate teacher. Still, it was a welcome addition to the limited home resources, and Marian hoped that it would be the commencement of a settled course of employment for him, something to make him feel that he was begin-

ning to get a footing in the place, and that only time and patience were needed to ensure him a fair measure of success.

But, after attending to the lessons for a week or two, his diligence began to flag. It was such a nuisance, he said, for a fellow to be tied down to times and seasons in that way. He could neither teach nor study, nor do anything else, except when the mood was upon him ; it was no use, he only made a failure of what he was doing, and wasted his time. He began to think that, after all, teaching was not the very best thing for him to devote himself to. It seemed to require a different sort of talent from his ; he thought he might say a lower order of talent, such as his sister Marian possessed ; patient, plodding industry, not real genius. Genius must have its own time and own way, and not be tied down to any particular

season for work. It took all the spring out of a fellow when he felt he was obliged to do a thing, whether he liked it or not. There was nothing so bad for a fellow as to feel himself tied down in that manner, when he ought to be left free to follow the bent of his own aspirations.

Composition was a higher branch of the profession. He thought he should get on better with composition. Not the severer departments of it, such as fugues and complicated movements and church music, but light drawing-room composition. People got better paid for that, than for giving lessons; besides obtaining a higher position in society. Teaching was only a second-rate sort of thing. Everybody allowed that teaching was only a second-rate sort of thing, especially when a fellow had a genius for anything better, as *he* had.

But of course he could not do both. If he was to devote himself to composition, he must give up teaching. It would never do, when the *afflatus* came upon him, and he was in the full exercise of the creative faculty, to have to put on his hat and trudge to the other side of Ulphusby, to attend some stupid little pupil, whose mamma would be offended if he did not turn up punctually at the time appointed. Punctuality would soon cost him very dear if he had to practise it at the expense of his composition. The pupils must be given up. Or perhaps, if Marian did not object to it, she might take them herself, as it seemed a pity to lose the connection. She had only two afternoons in the week engaged now—not such a very unreasonable demand upon her time, especially when she took into account how very hard he would have to work when he gave himself to the

new department of study. Besides, when a girl went in for that sort of thing, she might as well do it altogether, and Marian was one of those steady, methodical, plodding girls, who was always ready for work, always to be depended upon; as true as the Minster clock, and as regular. He was not cut out for plod or method, never was, never should be. If he did anything at all, he must do it at his own convenience. And if he could not do it so, he must just not do it at all.

That was why he thought he had better give up the idea of teaching altogether, and take to composition. It was more in his line; and what was the use of a fellow sticking to what was not in his line, because it happened to be a better paying thing just at first? The first was not everything that had to be looked at, when a man was considering the work he should stick

to all his life. It might be a year or two, perhaps more than that, before he got such good pay as he might have got by teaching in Ulphusby; but then in the end it would be so much better for himself and the family. He should be able to place them in a much more advantageous position, especially if he did make up his mind to go to London and settle there after awhile. But, at any rate, whether he went to London or not, and whether composition paid him at the first or not, he had quite decided to give up teaching. He could not bear to be at anyone's beck and bidding. He disliked having to consult other people's convenience, and attend to them when he ought to be able to give himself up to the inspiration of the moment. So he thought, on the whole, Marian had better take those pupils of his, unless she liked to let them slip through altogether, which

certainly did seem a pity; and then he should be at liberty to devote himself entirely to a branch of his profession for which his talents and disposition seemed to fit him so much better.

This was the substance of what Avery Govan said to his sister one night, as they sat talking together after Mrs. Govan had gone to bed. There was never anything said in her presence about altering of plans, never anything that could at all disturb the quiet which seemed so needful to her now. All that involved anxiety or uncertainty in the family arrangements was carefully kept away from her. She only saw the bright side of life as it was lived in that secluded old house in Ulphus Court. The rest—Avery's vacillation, the want of purpose in his studies, the waste of his time from day to day, Marian's continually increasing weight of care as their

expenses increased and their resources lessened—was kept away from her.

Marian heard what her brother had to say, and was again convinced—not convinced this time that the plan he proposed was the best plan, but convinced that it would be useless for her to oppose it. She had begun to doubt whether he had steadiness and application enough to succeed in teaching. Of his talent and intention to do something, she had never doubted. Nor had the thought ever entered her mind that a selfish love of ease and indulgence lay at the bottom of all these shifting purposes of his. She was ever ready to plead with herself in his behalf, if an impatient thought chanced to rise against him. It was difficult, she said, for a young man to find out at once what department of his profession to apply himself to for life. He must have time to develop

himself, and to become acquainted with his own powers ; and even though he might try one or two projects unsuccessfully, that was better, if he only found his way at last into the right groove, than labouring away all his life at some work for which he was not fitted, some work which would only jar and fret him, instead of bringing out into healthy exercise all the energies of his nature.

It was not likely, she said, that a man could succeed in work that he disliked. Of all things, teaching was the veriest drudgery for any one who had not a true talent for it ; and especially the teaching of music. She felt something of that herself, as she sat, morning after morning, with aching head, and jarred nerves, and strained patience, listening to the false notes and faulty time of her own little pupils ; and she was ready enough to admit that for Avery, with his finer

perception, and more delicately cultivated sense, the torture would be almost unendurable, even putting away altogether the consideration of having to accommodate himself to other people's convenience, and to adapt his will to theirs, and bear with all their little fidgetings. She was half disposed to reproach herself that she had ever persuaded him to enter upon such unproductive drudgery, so unsuited to his tastes and inclinations.

So she took the additional teaching into her own hands, and looked forward hopefully still to the time when her brother's unlimited leisure and undoubted talent should enable him not only to be a stay to the family, as he fully intended to be before long, but to make for himself a good name and a worthy position in the world.

CHAPTER VII.

A VERY'S first use of his unlimited leisure was to produce a set of quadrilles, dedicated to Mrs. Dexter, and illustrated with a very romantic frontispiece, bearing a far-off resemblance to that lady.

This production made a decided hit in the upper circles of Ulphusby. It was bought eagerly by the young ladies, and hummed by the students, and danced at all the private balls for some months after its appearance. Pecuniarily, it could not be considered a very great success, the publisher and the lithographer, as is generally the case, sharing between them nearly

all the profits. But it got Avery's name known, and introduced him to a great deal of gay society, and procured him much flattering attention, especially from Mrs. Dexter, who assured him that he was destined to become one of the most splendid composers of his time, and that one day Ulphusby would exult over his former residence in it, just as Leipsic, and Berlin, and Florence, gloried in their Mendelssohn, and Mozart, and Rossini.

Which complimentary remarks, coupled with the still more brilliant success of a sentimental ballad, brought out soon after the quadrilles, deepened in young Avery's mind the conviction, first planted there by Mrs. Dexter during that quiet little evening at St. Ninian's Lodge, that he was destined to a much more brilliant position than could possibly be achieved in the stupid little town of Ulphusby; and that

he was decidedly hiding his light under a bushel by placing it anywhere except in the exalted position which a residence in the metropolis would afford.

Besides, now that he had begun to make his way in fashionable society, it was a decided nuisance to be identified with that exceedingly obscure residence in Ulphus Court. When one distinguished person after another—the Bishop's lady, for instance, or the representatives of some of the leading county families—inquired concerning the young gentleman whose compositions were becoming so popular, it was, to say the least, unpleasant for them to be informed that his sister kept a little school for children, and went out to give music lessons, and took students to board in the house by way of helping to pay the rent. That sort of thing did not sound well. It was enough in itself to keep him

from the position to which his talents entitled him. Of course the best people in Ulphusby could not be expected to receive him as a man of his gifts ought to be received, when the obscurity of his home was known and commented upon. He ought to be away from his connections. It was altogether better for a young man to be out of reach of his connections. They always let him down so, and kept him from getting that attention in general society which he could have when he was occupying a position of his own. It had become a nuisance now to have people inquiring about him, and hearing of the school and the music teaching, and he thought the time had arrived when he should be justified in setting himself free from it by seeking a residence elsewhere.

London was the place for him. He had determined now to settle in London, and give himself

definitely to composition. He intended to talk it over with Marian some evening before long. Of course he would have to dip rather deeply into the home resources for a year or two. It was no use his going up to town unless he started well, and kept up a respectable appearance. The most foolish sort of economy was for a young man to lag behind the times in dress, and fashion, and amusements, when his success in the world depended entirely on his keeping up with everything that was going. He ought not to start with less than a hundred pounds in hand for the first few months, at any rate. That could easily be taken out of the principal from which their yearly income was derived; and then, when he got fairly afloat, he could pay it back, with more than interest. He would try to make it last him; and if he could not, why, Marian might lend him a few pounds, just to

keep him going. He had been no expense to his family yet, as he should have been if he had gone to College, and therefore he seemed to have the more right to a little accommodation of this sort, when it was so very needful to enable him to make a start in life.

Accordingly he opened the subject to Marian at the first favourable opportunity. He told her how he felt that he was wasting his time in Ulphusby. It was not the place, he was quite sure, for a young fellow who had any pluck in him; so awfully slow and stupid, no life stirring in it, nothing going that was worth taking an interest in. Besides, if he intended to give himself to composition—and the success his quadrilles had met with, warranted him in considering that as his *forte*—if he intended to give himself to composition, he must be in a town where he could hear the best styles, and

get acquainted with first-rate masters, and have access to good musical society, and have the opportunity of mixing with people who understand all that sort of thing, and get himself introduced to publishers and managers of concerts, none of which advantages could be obtained in a place like Ulphusby. He had made up his mind that he must get into a wider sphere, and he thought no sphere would be so wide as London. He must contrive somehow to get himself established in London. He should never be content, now that he had once got the notion of making a start in composition, until he was fairly established in London.

Marian's heart misgave her. Not even yet, though, about her brother's fitness to get on in the world. She had never doubted—perhaps it was a merciful thing for herself that she had not—his ability to do great things, both for himself

and the family. She had already enough to bear, without the bitter consciousness of his unworthiness and want of noble purpose. She still clung to the hope, clung to by so many other women, equally loving and faithful, concerning so many other men, equally idle and hopeless, that if he could only "get into something suitable," if only he could get fair play in a situation where his peculiar talents would be brought out and expanded, he would work cheerfully on until he made himself a credit to his family. She was not afraid of his success, so far as talent and good-will could ensure it. But she knew something of the temptations of a great city. She had heard what black tide of infamy and shame pours silently down its streets; with what wisdom he must keep his feet who would walk unspotted through it. She knew how many a lad, compassed with the memories

of a happy home, guarded by the sweet restraint of a mother's prayers and a sister's love, had felt them, and perhaps sadly, unwillingly felt them, dropping away from him, until there lay nothing but his own feeble will between him and the guilt whose stain no suffering nor repentance can quite wash out. And she feared for her brother, lest he, too, on whom one day they hoped to lean their own weakness, should fail to hold himself erect where so many of the strong had fallen.

There was but one plan she could think of, if Avery's mind was quite fixed upon going to London. That was to give up the house in Ulphus Court, disperse her little school, and go with him. They might find some quiet spot in the outskirts of London, where she could gather together a few pupils, and get music teaching, and perhaps meet with one or two lodgers, as

she had done in Ulphusby. As for Mrs. Govan, it mattered little now to her in what place their lot was cast, so long as she had her daughter to depend upon. The battle had been too hard for her. She had been sore wounded, past hope of healing. The most that those who loved her now could do, was to carry her where the sick and feeble lay beyond reach of the strife; and then, with such strength as they had left, fight on until they either conquered or fell.

As for herself, though a quiet home feeling had begun to gather round the old house in Ulphus Court, though the content of a busy, unselfish life, the kindness of Aunt Phillis, and Roda's bright friendship, were beginning to wear away the sad thoughts which oppressed her at first, still, every place where she could take care of her mother, and work for Avery, would be home to her. She had made no other

ties. She had almost given over thinking that life could hold any other interests for her than those which belonged to them, or that the time would ever come when, speaking their names, any other should linger deeper in her heart. Wherever she went for the present, hard work and patient waiting must be her portion. The time would come, she hoped, when both these might lie behind her, when she would remember them as the mariner in some quiet haven thinks of storms and tempests overpast. But so long as that quiet haven was reached, it mattered little by which one out of many tracks she gained it.

To her great surprise, however, Avery did not at all fall in with her proposal for removing the family home to London.

“Nonsense, Marian,” he said. “I wouldn’t for the world have us all go dragging up there

together, and scarcely anything to keep up a decent appearance upon—and the little school and the lodgers. It would be a regular nuis—I mean——”

Avery stopped, and considered how he might manage to place his objections in a more favourable light. He could scarcely bring himself yet to tell the sister whose toil kept them all from poverty, that it was a nuisance to be recognized as belonging to her; that, in fact, he had now got to that stage of refinement when his connections were decidedly burdensome, except so far as they saved him from the troublesome necessity of earning his own living. He knew there were limits even to a sister's forbearance. Perhaps Marian's deep-lying energy could, upon occasion, develop itself in quite another line than school-keeping and music teaching, even in that determined power of resistance which some-

times lurks beneath these quiet, undemonstrative natures.

"I mean, Marian, you know," he said, in a pleasanter tone, "it would be a pity for you and mother to break up your home and make a fresh start in life, now that you seem to have got into a comfortable track here at Ulphusby. Besides, London isn't the place for women who don't care for struggle and push, and all that sort of thing, and can't go in for real hard work."

Marian thought she had gone in for that pretty considerably lately, but she did not say anything about it; she had got so accustomed to taking the work as her share and leaving the rest to others, that it would have seemed strange to do anything else now.

"Push and struggle would be just a bore to you, Marian," Avery continued, "though I don't mind a bit about it, and I should be quite

content to fight my way there alone, whilst you and mother staid quiet and comfortable here, just as you are. I've got my own way to make, and I'll make it as well as I can. If only you don't mind my drawing a few pounds out of the capital to begin with. Of course, you know, I can't start upon nothing; a fellow must have a little for bread and cheese, until he gets time to turn round and see what he can do for himself. It was a burning shame of that old Alison to tie me down as he did, and give me no salary for all this year, whilst you have been putting by such a tidy little sum with your teaching."

Marian did venture to remind her brother that he might have put by almost as much, if he had been disposed to take pupils. He just used to vex her a little sometimes with his thoughtlessness in not making so much exertion as he might have done for the help of the family.

But she would never allow, even to herself, still less to anyone else, that it was more than that, more than the thoughtlessness of youth and inexperience, which would pass away by-and-by, when he got to know more of the world, and really to feel the need of exerting himself. But Avery was not disposed for even such a gentle reproach as his sister's reminder implied.

"Nonsense, Marian. You talk just like a woman. Women always seem to think that men have nothing else to do but plod along in their little pottering ways. What sort of a position do you think I should have got if I had begun teaching children at eighteenpence a lesson, as you do? Of course it's all very well for you to do it, because a woman never expects to get paid as a man ought to be. Eighteenpence a lesson is quite enough for a woman who has never really given herself to the study of

music, as I have done. And even if I got eighteen times eighteen-pence, I should never care to take it, because teaching isn't in my line. If you had understood me, you might have known that from the very first. I'm not cut out for it. It was a great mistake—though, of course, as you did it for the best, I never turned against you for it—to say anything about my going to Alison."

"But," urged Marian, "it was your own wish to enter the profession as a teacher. You said nothing about composition then."

"Confound you!" and Avery threw the roll of music he was playing with, across the room. "I mean I didn't intend to say anything improper; but you women really are enough to drive a fellow out of his wits sometimes. You never know how to say the right thing at the right time. What's the use of throwing it in

my teeth now that I wanted to enter the profession as a teacher? Of course I did, because there didn't seem any other way of entering it, and I couldn't tell then that it wasn't my line. How can a fellow tell what his line is before he's had a chance to try it?"

"I suppose he can tell it as well as anyone else can tell it for him!" said Marian, drily. "It seems we were both of us a little bit mistaken."

"Of course we were. Only you might have known more about it than I did, always being accustomed to think and arrange things, as a fellow with any go in him can't be expected to do. But, however, I've about made up my mind to go to London; and when once I get there, and have a fair start, see if I don't make something of a shine. I've got heaps of things in my head—quadrilles, and waltzes, and all

sorts of dance music, and I only want a chance to show them to some enterprising publisher. I know he would soon make a good thing of them."

"Couldn't you send them?" suggested Marian.

"No, I couldn't. A composer must go and make his own bargain, and let people see that he isn't going to be beaten down with his prices. Why, young Forbes, that I met at Mrs. Dexter's the other evening, told me that he knew a firm in London that gave a friend of his three hundred a year for nothing else but supplying them with dance music. I'm just the fellow for them, if only they knew about me. I could keep half-a-dozen firms going with first-rate dance music. Only trust me, Marian, and don't fancy that I want somebody always at my elbow to look after me. I shall go along as straight as a fiddle, if

only I get a good start. I'm out of my time with old Alison in six weeks, and I hope he'll get someone else to work for him as hard as I've done for the last twelvemonths. And so, Marian, if you'll have my things looked over and straightened up, I'll be off to some respectable place in London, and I'll undertake to eat all the kid gloves I have, if you don't hear of me in less than six months as one of the most promising young composers of the day."

Marian thought she had perhaps been too hard upon him. He looked so bright and handsome and hopeful, as he sat there in Mrs. Govan's easy-chair, expatiating on his brilliant prospects, explaining to his sister how he meant to be such a comfort to them all in a few years' time; only let him get himself fairly started. She promised to make all right about the money, and then she kissed him, and went to tell their

mother of the proposed plan. At least, to tell her so much of it as appeared pleasant and promising.

CHAPTER VIII.

“JUST as you like, my dear,” Mrs. Govan said, when Marian laid her scheme before her, and explained how they could draw out a hundred pounds of their capital for Avery to start with in London; and how, his time of pupilage with Mr. Alison being expired, and his tastes not inclining him to settle down in a dull place like Ulphusby, it seemed the best thing for him to make another start in a more extended sphere. And then Marian told her how she had been thinking of writing to some friends in London, and asking them to look out for respectable rooms for him, and to show him a little

kindness now and then when he went, a stranger and fatherless, to try his fortunes where so many had wrecked theirs. "Just as you like, my dear, I leave everything to you. I am sure you will do what you can for the best."

That was generally the answer Marian got when she proposed anything to her mother. Perfect trust in her judgment, perfect acquiescence in all her plans, contented rolling over upon her shoulders of whatever foresight or contrivance or management the household affairs required; she was always sure of these things when any change had to be made, or any new arrangement taken into consideration.

She used to think sometimes what a rest it would have been, if she could have rolled over to someone stronger, wiser, better than herself, that weight of thought and care which pressed so heavily upon her. Would it ever be that she

should be able to rest upon another, as others now rested upon her,—that to some sweet earthly friend she might say, as now she could only say to the great Friend above,

“ I know that thou carest for me always ? ”

It might be, or it might not. What she had to do was to wait patiently and to work diligently. So she did both.

Avery went to London, and soon began to send home very glowing accounts of his successes there. He had got access to some first-rate families, he said. He had met with some of his old student-friends from Ulphusby and Glasgow, who moved now in very good society ; and they had introduced him to one or two capital people, who would be able to give him a famous lift in his profession. Indeed, if he chose it, he might be out every night, invitations poured in so thickly ; and such very flattering attentions were

paid him when he played and sung at fashionable parties. Of course it was a great catch at those parties to get a young man who could make himself agreeable, especially in the musical line; and a fellow might make his way into almost any sort of company, with a good voice and a fine touch upon the piano. But he did not intend to make himself too cheap. It was a great mistake for a man who intended to get on in the world, to be always going out, and giving people the idea that he had nothing to do at home. He meant to drop a few of the more ordinary sort of invitations by-and-by, and keep entirely to the best circles, where he could always make himself agreeable enough to secure a welcome.

Then it was very important, he said, that he should attend the concerts, and drop in at all the oratorios, and know what was going on at the

opera-houses, and that sort of thing took up a good deal of time, besides being rather expensive. Marian need not think, however, that he was going into needless extravagance. She might rely upon him for keeping within the mark. There was nothing a fellow had more need to do in London than to keep within the mark ; but still, at the same time, he must keep up to it, and not let people think that he had not enough to do upon. Nothing let a person down so much in good society, as for people to get the notion that he had not enough to live upon. That put an extinguisher upon him at once. And so, if he found it necessary at times to go a little further in his personal expenses than he used to go at Ulphusby, Marian must not think it was because he was getting high notions, but only that he might not let himself down among people who had admitted him into

their set, and who would very soon turn him out of it, if he wasn't up to the mark in gentlemanliness, and all that sort of thing.

No word, though, as yet, of any great success at his publisher's, nor of any remunerative offers made to him for those countless quadrilles and waltzes with which his fertile brain was teeming, when he left Ulphusby, to pour them into the lap of an admiring metropolitan public. No word, either, of any very close reading or studying of the great masters, Bach and Purcell, and others, whose works on fugue, and counterpoint, and harmony Mr. Alison used to con so diligently, and which he said ought to be familiar as the alphabet to every young man who would rise to honourable eminence in his profession. If Avery was making his way to eminence at all, he was making it by a much more flowery path than all the great musicians of the past had

trodden before him. He was resting where they had toiled, and taking pleasure where they had taken pains. But, then, as he liked to say of himself, he was an original, and originals of any kind must be allowed to climb to fame after their own fashion.

Roda, who used to hear Avery Govan's letters read sometimes, thought they were very different to the letters Alec sent from Frankfort. For Alec's letters, though generally running over with fun and humour—he had quite got over his loneliness now, except an occasional fit of it—told, at the same time, of real hard work, of something definite aimed at, and something tangible accomplished. Sometimes, for a month or two, his letters would be very short, his only excuse being that he was "busy." Then, by-and-by, he would tell them, just as if it had been the most ordinary thing in the

world, that he had passed such and such an examination, or gained such and such an honour, or won some prize which had been competed for amongst the students. Just that,—nothing more than the bare fact ; not a word of complacency at his own success, or the amount of hard work it had cost him, or the congratulations he had received from the professors. Dr. Montagu used to laugh heartily when these curt announcements of Alec's victories came to hand, and say that he expected, in the course of a year or two, when his young friend had got through the Civil Service examinations, he would be writing to him at the Old Deanery—"got a first-rate appointment at head-quarters," or, "elected to the Colonial Office, eight hundred a year," or, "please address your next to the Governor-General of Canada." Nothing more than that !

Roda was downright glad that Avery Govan had gone away. He put her into a bad temper, she said, every time she met him. It required almost more courtesy than her knowledge of the world had yet taught, to keep her from telling him, as he lounged about the Close in his fashionably cut coat and lavender kids, that he was just a stuck-up, good-for-nothing young puppy—a piece of information which would doubtless have been both novel and startling to the receiver of it, suggesting to him quite an unexpected idea of his own position in the world.

But then, as his sister said, he was *only* young. A man at one or two-and-twenty can scarcely be said to have gathered his energies around him for actual fight. He is only, as it were, trying his unskilful hand, essaying to prove the weapons with which, by-and-by, he

may do good service in many a tough encounter. The conviction was slowly working its way into her mind that Avery did lack concentration and application, but she would not allow herself to think even yet that he wanted the willingness to work. She had heard of men, able workers and earnest thinkers, who at two-and-twenty had not yet found their place in life, or who, if they had found it, were filling it with but very scant measure of that energy and activity which they afterwards put forth. Avery had been working at a disadvantage ever since he began to work at all. He had never seen his duty clearly laid out before him, so clearly laid out that there was nothing left but to follow it. He had always been putting off the time, just employing himself with anything that happened to turn up, until he could enter upon the work for which he was

fitted. Now, at last, she hoped he had found it; and she was sure he would work at it until he had made a man of himself.

Only, as he said, he must get a position first—something to work upon. That was reasonable enough. A young man could not be expected to go to a place like London almost without friends, without introduction, without any sort of foundation of his own to give him stability, and bound into competence all at once. He must feel his way first, and get known amongst people who would be able to help him on. Perhaps this sort of life that he was living now, though rather dissipating for a young man, and certainly too expensive to be kept up much longer, was, as he said, quite needful to secure him a position in good society. When once that was secured, he would see the necessity of drawing in, and considering how

great the sacrifices were which they had to make at home, in order to keep him as he was living now. Indeed, she was quite sure he was considering it all along. His letters showed that he was not unconscious of the demands he was making upon them. All the flattery and attention that was heaped upon him did not make him forget these things. He was not going so much into society for the sake of the pleasure it gave him to be caressed and admired, but only that he might prepare the way towards helping his family by establishing himself upon a better footing than he could have gained without such means. She would never think it of her brother Avery—the brother whom she had loved and cherished so long—that he would take a single comfort out of their home at Ulphusby to turn it into a luxury for himself, or purchase with their self-denial the

means of ministering to his own more abundant enjoyment.

Marian Govan did not know that some men, though they lose the innocent child-heart soon enough, never lose the childish weakness which will not toil or suffer, except under the controlling influence of an authority which they cannot withstand. There are those who, all through life, need, to supplement their unmanly idleness, that which a woman needs to supplement her natural weakness,—the presence of a stronger will, a more resolute, unyielding disposition. Only that, in the case of a woman, this supplementing force is needed to do for her that which God never meant she should do for herself; whereas, in the case of a man, it is needed to drive him to that which it is a shame and a humiliation for him to neglect. Avery Govan had the ability to work, but he wanted the will

to exercise that ability, so long as any one else would toil for him. The material was there, but some strong hand was needed to crush it out of him and give it to the world. And for want of that strong hand laid heavily upon him, for want of some resistless authority, holding him steadily down to such place and work as were his, crushing out of him, as it were, by sheer force of necessity, that which was in him to give, his life became a failure. He was like unwrought iron, which, because no strong hammer has oftentimes fallen upon it, breaks when it should hold firm, and, breaking, reveals the pitiful hollowness and dross within.

It was not his sister's place to be to him what every true man ought to be to himself, the prompter unto energy and self-denial in the noble seriousness of life. The man who strikes a woman is not a greater coward than he who,

having a man's strength, a man's power to do and to endure, shelters himself behind courage and self-denial of hers, taking from her what he ought to bestow, and putting upon her what she ought to receive from him. And it is only because her charity never faileth, that a man taking from any woman such protection as this, does not take from her at the same time that which it should be his joy and crown to preserve intact,—faith in his love and reverence for his power.

It was just Avery's selfishness, unsuspected as yet by those whom most it injured, which made him content to let others toil and suffer in his behalf, he meanwhile sweetening his idle life with the fruit of their labour. For selfishness lurks, in some natures, like granite in the crust of the earth, underlying, penetrating, overtopping every other stratum of motive or in-

fluence. There are some layers in the formation of character, of which, like the various earths and minerals which the geologist finds in his researches, a skilful observer may to some extent calculate the position, and measure the extent. At any rate, he knows that, having penetrated to a given depth, or having come to certain other formations, he will not stumble upon these any more ; he has got out of their range, beyond the reach of their influence. But the granite is always cropping up. The geologist never gets through that, never comes to any region where he is sure of not striking upon it. As it makes the lofty mountain peak which no skill of his will ever scale, so it lies below the lowest depth which toil or patience of his can fathom. And when the explorer of the earth's crust has reached a point beyond which granite cannot be found, then the delver into some

human natures may hope to chance upon a spot unhardened by the rock of selfishness, untracked by vein or layer of that formation which underlies and overtops every other.

CHAPTER IX.

WHILST young Mr. Avery was starring it in such gay society as was willing to admit him to its charmed circle, and whilst Alec was working away amongst the grey-haired professors and bearded students of Frankfort, now and then sending to his friends at the Old Deanery a brief bulletin of progress, and whilst Marian Govan kept on her patient round of toil, asking no reward but the quiet consciousness of duty done, Roda's life was gradually brightening out into all the sunny freshness of advancing womanhood ; taking into itself every day some new joy, enlarging to hold more fullness of hope and promise.

No hard-beaten track of duty vexed her young feet. No one asked from her what it is a weariness to a woman to be always bestowing—strength to the weak, counsel to the more ignorant. None sought again what everyone gave to her so richly—the guard of superior wisdom, the shelter of that sweet protecting love which saves from all anxious thought, and takes from the path which youth and hope must tread, everything but its flowers.

It seemed as though the good angels of God, who bring to so many of His children only a summons to suffer and to wait, gathered round Roda Montagu and said,

“We will make this child happy. We will keep the heavens bright above her; her feet shall always tread upon the softest, tenderest grass. There shall be no blight upon the fruits that she stays to gather as she goes along; there

shall be no sad note in the music to which her steps keep time. Tears must be wept, but her eyes shall not weep them. Many hands must be lifted up to heaven full of burdens, weary with the day's long toil ; hers shall only be stretched forth to give the incense of a gladsome heart ; and whilst others pray for the evening shadows to lengthen, that their labours may have an end, she shall bid the sweet hours linger, which bring her, in their coming and their going, only joy."

For, indeed, as the desires of her life deepened, so also did the springs of gladness, from which they might be filled. There was never for her any unsatisfied longing which kept crying "give, give," whilst the stream flowed past, just out of reach, and left its thirst for ever unquenched. Every side of her nature found room to come to the light. There was no part darkened, distorted,

kept down by neglect or unkindness. She grew and blossomed under a genial sky, where the sunshine never failed, and the dews of blessing always fell.

Perhaps, like many another little flower which blooms through the pleasant summer time, in the shelter of some well-tended garden, she never knew the care expended upon her. She never knew whose thoughtful love placed its ever-ready guard between her tender life and the over-hot sunshine, or the blasting east wind, which might have nipped it; nor how many a lurking enemy of blight or mildew she escaped through that same watchful care. She only knew that the sun and the dew, the rain and the breezes, came when she needed them. All she had to do was to unfold her little blossom, taking in the sweet influences around her, to give them forth again in fairer colours, and richer

perfume ; trusting that when the time came for the colours to fade, and the perfume to be spent, the hand which had tended her so lovingly through the bright spring and summer sunshine, would not lose its cunning in winter's chill, but keep her safely even then, to another and a better blossoming time.

Roda's only trouble so far had been the going away of Alec Ianson. That really did seem, for a day or two, to take all the joy and all the brightness out of her life. She thought then the sun had no right to shine, because Alec was away ; and even Aunt Phillis was cruel to wear that placid smile, and speak in that genial loving tone, when her own heart was so full of a sorrow which could never be changed for gladness any more. That could not last very long, though.

The sunshine did come back. The sorrow

did go out of her heart, spite of Roda's certainty that it had taken up its abode there for ever. And by-and-by the hope of Alec's return, which was not such a very far distant thing, after all, became almost as bright as his very presence used to be.

Besides, when she once made up her mind that he really had gone away, and would not come back again for a year and a half, and therefore it was no use repining at what discontent could neither alter nor improve, she was astonished at the quietness which came over her about that parting which at first had seemed so very terrible. It just took its place in her life as one of those things which cannot be helped, which must be made the best of. And as sensible people, who happen to have an unsightly, gnarled stump in their garden, which cannot well be hewed up, hide it

with a luxuriant overgrowth of ivy or creepers, or trailing wealth of foliage, until only just enough of the withered thing is seen to give more freshness to its covering, so Roda had twined about this sad coloured fact of Alec's absence, so many pleasant fancies of his home-coming again, so many sweet hopes, and flowering thoughts of him, that what little unsightly glimpses of it did still peep out, only seemed to add brightness to the garniture which, but for them, would never have been woven.

Roda Montagu was a real little philosopher, though she had never so much as heard of ethics or controlling forces, or balance of motives, or any of those grand hazy wrappings wherewith the schoolmen envelop what they have to say. She knew how to sit down before an unalterable fact, as wise learners do before an unalterable mystery—not trying to clear it away, but just

taking it as it is, and making the best of it. Perhaps the sagest professor that ever lived can do no more than this.

Then she knew that Alec had not forgotten her, and that made such a wonderful difference. The days would indeed have seemed very dark and dreary if he had never taken any notice of her, nor sent any kind messages, nor asked any questions about her, nor said over and over again how much he was looking forward to next spring, when he hoped to come back and settle down for a whole year in Ulphusby. He had often enough said, when he was in it, what a stupid little spot this same Ulphusby was, and what a dismal thing it must be always to have to live in it, or even to have to stay a very long time there, it was so very dull and sluggish, and the people, excepting of course those at the Old Deanery, had such stuck-up notions of their

own greatness. He was quite sure he wouldn't settle down in Ulphusby for anything that could be given him. The remembrance of such remarks as these gave ten times more sweetness to what he said now in almost every letter, about the pleasure of coming back again ; for would he like, Roda thought, to come back to such a dull stupid place as Ulphusby, unless there was someone in it that he cared for and remembered, just as she should care for and remember him if she went ever so far away, and made ever so many new friends? That thought of being held in Alec's memory, and being able to make the hope of coming back a pleasant thing to him, quite took away from Roda's loving little heart all the sadness of the months when he was away.

And then there were other interests springing up in her life now, to make it very bright and

pleasant. People were giving over treating her like a child. When they came to call at the Old Deanery, they addressed her as "Miss Montagu," and talked to her as though she were capable of understanding sensible conversation, instead of altering their voices and calling her "dear little Roda," and putting on that very patronising, condescending manner which most of the Close ladies, and especially Mrs. Dexter, used to assume until within the last two or three months. Her last birthday present from Aunt Phillis was a silver card-case, with her initials, R. M., engraved outside. It was fitted into a morocco box, and lay upon a crimson velvet cushion, its beautiful chased border of scrolls and arabesque work dazzling Roda's eyes every time she went to look at it. But she did not value it half so much for its beauty as for what it whispered to

her of the days, so very near now, when, with the right to use it, she should enter into all the privileges and immunities of young ladyhood ; when, like the early, dried-up, useless leaves of a lily plant, whose fair coronal of flowers is just ready to burst into bloom, all these gradually lessening restraints of lessons and compositions, exercises and practisings and French translations, should drop away, and leave her free for the bright new life to which she had been looking forward so long, and of which the little foretastes she had already had at St. Ninian's Lodge had been so very sweet.

For Mrs. Dexter's quiet evening had been followed by several others, at all of which the Rev. Marcus Fabian had dropped in, quite by accident, of course, on his way from some of the numerous services at St. Chad's, and had been so extremely delighted to have the opportunity

of seeing Miss Montagu. It was such a very great treat, he said, to hear Miss Montagu play and sing, and to talk to her about church music, she being, as he frequently took occasion to remark, the only young lady he had met with who could converse upon that subject with the ease of one who understood and appreciated it. And then, under cover of turning over the leaves of her music, or listening to those pretty little English songs which she could sing so sweetly, he never failed to whisper some dainty compliment—whispering it too with those earnest looks and lingering wistful tones which fall so pleasantly into a young girl's heart, because they tell her of power to charm, of sway which she can bear over others, of a sceptre fair as any queen's, just within her reach, only waiting for her to take it; which, when she chooses to stretch it forth, so many will press forward

to touch and kiss in token of their homage.

Roda must not be stigmatised as irreclaimably vain and frivolous, because such flatteries as Mr. Fabian knew so well how to give, coloured her thoughts rather deeply at times. If a yet uncrowned queen may be forgiven for casting a longing glance now and then towards the insignia of royalty which will so soon be placed, with all the pomp and ceremony of the coronation-day, upon her brow, then Roda must not be too harshly judged if sometimes she looked forward eagerly, impatiently, to the time when she should have a right to wear her crown, and hold sway in the fair domain of beauty; or if she received, with the innocent pride of an unspoiled young heart, these chance foretastes of the homage which would by-and-by be all her own. This was not the whole of her life; it never would be. Her nature, which had been

moulded by Aunt Phillis's influence, which had taken its bent and impulse from her wise, loving example, would never content itself with the mere consciousness of power to attract, or with the delicious flatteries which spring up thickly as daisies in the summer time around the footsteps of beauty. These might dazzle for a season, they would never control. They might ruffle, as they passed, the surface of her thoughts, and mar, perhaps, for a time, the perfect reflection of nobler things; but the clear deep of feeling and motive beneath would be still untouched, and when the chance breeze had passed away, whatever of truth, and nobleness, and simplicity had once found its image there, would behold itself again, fair as before.

What sweet hopes and memories, too, had their resting-place beneath that perhaps too easily ruffled surface; would neither be stirred

nor injured by these transient gusts which swept over them from time to time. Fast rooted there, still growing and spreading, they served by what they gave and took to keep fresh the stream which but for them might have lost its crystal pureness. Many a girl's human love stands to her for a time in the place of that other and diviner affection, which alone can purify and keep for ever pure the deep waters of life. It holds the better part of her nature safe from the spoiler's hand. It is to her as a quiet habitation, and a sure resting-place from the pettinesses and frivolities which gather so thickly around her. They may vex, and they may sometimes disturb her, but they can never spoil her life whilst there lies beyond them all a little sanctuary, into which she may withdraw and be at peace. Sometimes it is through this gate of human love that God leads the souls of his chosen ones into

the holier temple of His own great love, which gathers up into itself all others, so teaching them by the sweet faithfulness which, though sorely tried, wavers never, to measure in some feeble sort the far-reaching depth of that pity and tenderness, which, through a whole long lifetime of trial, faileth not nor is weary.

CHAPTER X.

CHRISTMAS came, and with it the very mild round of gaieties with which the genteel circles of Ulphusby were wont to commemorate that festive season. The church of St. Chad's arose and put on its beautiful garments, or rather had them put on for it by a committee of young ladies appointed for that purpose, who, under the direction of the Rev. Marcus Fabian, had for some time beforehand been demolishing fabulous quantities of holly, ivy, yew, laurel, and such winter flowers as could be obtained, in the production of wreaths, garlands, festoons, crosses, monograms, legends, and

other varieties of ecclesiastical decoration. These were allowed to accumulate in the vestries until such time as the Rev. Marcus Fabian, at the head of his fair band of neophytes, was able to superintend the arrangement of them, according to the modes prescribed by the Anglican Monitor for the several occasions of Christmas, Whittide, and Easter.

These periodic diets of decoration were looked forward to with considerable interest by the unmarried portion of the St. Chad's congregation. They were to many of the young ladies and gentlemen worshipping in that sanctuary, what balls and evening assemblies and quadrille parties are to the devotees of the fashionable world,—facilities for carrying on much that was not connected with the avowed object of their meeting together, but which was still pleasant, and in its way quite as harmless

and innocent as anything else that was accomplished during the performances. Certainly a most agreeable amount of flirtation, leading sometimes to consequences still more agreeable, used to be carried on beneath the old black-beamed roof of St. Chad's, before that venerable edifice had been rendered sufficiently gorgeous for the choral service, which took place in it during Christmas-tide. For though Mrs. Dexter, and Miss Lesbanks, and the Misses Ducannon, and other young ladies belonging to the select fellowship of the Close aristocracy, could manipulate ecclesiastical devices, and illuminate legends, and arrange holly berries into the form of Greek, or Roman, or Maltese crosses, their dainty hands could by no means fasten up the legends when they were illuminated, or wreath those lofty pillars with the several garlands and festoons which had been

prepared for them, nor reach to twine the garniture of yew and lauristinus round the lofty chandeliers, nor rear into its place the ponderous cross of white-veined *palmata* and holly berries, whose gleaming leaves sparkled above the altar lights as though gemmed with thousands of diamonds and rubies.

Accordingly, those of the Ulphusby students who had High Church proclivities, and a few incipient young curates, and Mr. Sparks, the amateur organist of the church, were summoned, with divers others, by the Rev. Marcus Fabian, to assist in the good work; and when the Ulphusby students, and the incipient young curates, and the amateur organist, and the divers other unappropriated gentlemen known to be on the look-out for matrimonial promotion, were exposed for successive afternoons and evenings, defenceless and unarmed, save with a

hammer, and a few nails, and balls of string, to all the bright artillery, the radiant smiles, and arch glances, and coquettish graces, and fascinations numberless, of the ladies' decorative committee, it was easy to foresee that something quite different to amateur carpentry would be going on within the ancient and venerable edifice of St. Chad's, and that much more precious things than sprays of holly and laurustinus would be tied together, whilst those pillars and aisles and splendid old carved oak stalls were being wreathed with such interminable ropes of sparkling greenery.

For many a graceful, elegant young girl of advanced ritualistic tendencies, who would have thought it very wrong to go to a ball and flirt there, or to waste her time in promenading at horticultural exhibitions, for the purpose of attracting the attentions of members of the

opposite sex, saw no harm in casting the most irresistible of glances towards the gentleman who, under her directions, was nailing up a splendidly illuminated "I. H. S." in front of the altar, or rewarding him with a cruelly beautiful smile, when she descended gracefully from the steps, where he had been supporting her whilst she put a few finishing touches to the wreath of *immortelles* on the great cross in front of the east window. And though, of course, she would indignantly have disclaimed any intentions of the sort, still she knew well enough that she was robbing this same gentleman of something much more valuable than an hour or two of evening leisure, when she kept him lingering by her side, to supply her with a laurel leaf now and then for the garland she was weaving, or to help her in arranging it, when it was finished, around the sculptured

pedestal of the marble pulpit. Who, indeed, except the lowest and most narrow-minded of churchwomen, could say that Miss Amy Duncannon was to blame, if Mr. Gower, the young gentleman who had just taken deacon's orders, happened to detain her little white hand for a moment as she took from his one after another of those holly sprays, with which she was so tastefully wreathing the brazen lectern? And was the fault to be laid to anything but the prickly nature of the leaves, if they took so long separating and arranging, that the sexton had been waiting, with the keys of the sacred edifice in his hands, for nearly ten minutes before that lectern was finally completed, and Amy and the young deacon could safely leave it to stand upon its own merits? Certainly the sexton did not appear to be laying any blame upon either of them, as the old-fashioned tin lantern

which he was holding up revealed a sly twinkle in his eye, and something like a knowing smile on the wizened, wrinkled, yet kindly face. *He* knew well enough what came of those church decorations, for many a wedding half-crown or five-shilling piece had been his share of the fun, not long after. If Christmas came ten times a year, with its garniture of holly and ivy, old Tomkins would not have been the first to grumble at the innovation.

Then, again, as every one who has had anything to do with church decoration knows what troublesome things those graduated festoons are, and how almost impossible it is, if they once get a twitch or a wrong turn, to make them hang properly again, was it not exceedingly natural that Mr. Sparks, the organist, and Ethel Brook, the sweetest soprano in his amateur choir, should find it rather difficult to arrange that particular

one in front of the organ gallery, because it was so very long, and required such great care in the management of its various curves? And, of course, neither Mr. Sparks nor Miss Brooks could think of such a thing as troubling the other ladies and gentlemen, who were busy over their own work below, to come up and assist them. They were quite willing to take the trouble of it between themselves, only that being the case, there was no need for Miss Bolte, the Moral Philosophy professor's daughter, who had an eye to Mr. Sparks herself, to make any remark about it, or to say to her companion, Miss Aspinall, as they were decorating the Sunday scholars' pews, without any individuals of the male sex to help them, that really Miss Brook did not appear to have any idea of propriety, and that for her own part she would rather have left the festoon to hang in any sort of position,

than have staid up in that gallery for full three quarters of an hour, with a gentleman who could not but see what were her motives for such unbecoming behaviour. Although, after Miss Ethel Brook had gone away with her student brother, Miss Bolte had no objection, when invited by Mr. Sparks, to step up into the gallery herself, to see how very nicely the festoon did hang, and to assist Mr. Sparks in arranging a few sprays of holly around the singers' music stands; which arrangement perhaps occupied rather more time than Miss Bolte would have spent over it, if only Miss Aspinall had been there to tie up the leaves for her.

What harm was there either, in young Ducannon adding a graceful compliment or a pretty little *bonbon* of flattery to the delicate ivy wreaths which he was handing from his basket to Miss Lucy Brook for the decoration of the

font? And if sometimes he lost his self-possession, and was so absorbed in admiration of her sweet face and pretty attitudes that he quite forgot to hand the wreaths in proper succession, and had to be recalled to a sense of his duties by Lucy's oft-repeated—"Now, Mr. Ducannon," does any one think that she got out of patience with him for his forgetfulness, or visited it upon him by any sorer punishment than a bright smile and a glance of more than usual mischievousness? Lucy knew well enough that those little hands which were flitting in and out amongst the ivy leaves were white enough to tear almost any mortal student's heart out of his bosom, and that no fortification of logic, divinity, moral philosophy, rhetoric, or *belles lettres*, could be proof against the artillery which played down upon him from those merry, mischievous hazel eyes, now so soft and coaxing, now sparkling

with a whole arsenal of ammunition in the shape of fun and playfulness, and pretty defiance. Poor Mr. Ducannon! He might go back to his moral philosophy and his study of logic and rhetoric, but he would make painfully slow progress henceforth in these most essential branches of a divinity student's collegiate course, until that little hand flitting about now amongst the ivy leaves had been promised to him by its owner for ever, and those sweet hazel eyes had veiled their saucy glances, and looked into his own instead, the unspoken answer to the love which they had kindled.

These little touches of by-play were as interesting an addition to the decorations as the decorations themselves were to the church in which they were being placed; and lingered, pleasant, fragrant memories in the hearts of those who gave and took them, long after the

holly was shrivelled, and the laurel withered, and the ivy dried up, and the last vestige of device or legend swept away, in order that St. Chad's might be re-attired for the feast of the Epiphany. But none of the young ladies belonging to the decorative committee got half so many pretty speeches and elegant compliments, or did half so much mischief to unappropriated male affections, as Roda Montagu, who, under the chaperonage of Mrs. Dexter, was adding her little mite of assistance to the more experienced of Mr. Fabian's coadjutors. The curate of St. Chad's, foreseeing this golden opportunity, and hoping thereby still farther to increase his chance of success, had prevailed upon Miss Chickory to allow him to invite Roda to join the other young ladies of the congregation in the preparation of the Christmas decorations.

One or two evenings had already been very delightfully spent at St. Ninian's Lodge, avowedly in the illuminating of a gorgeous device for the front of the great gallery, but really in the much more fascinating occupation of flattering and being flattered; and now Mr. Fabian was lingering by her side, waiting upon her with all the devotion of a professed admirer, as she flitted about amongst the great heaps of evergreens, looking so pretty and unconscious, pretending to make herself useful in the weaving of festoons for the pillars, or tying up little bunches of *immortelles* to decorate the great cross under the east window, but in reality doing nothing but taking the shine out of all the other young ladies by her own surpassing loveliness and grace. Doing it, too, very considerably to the discomfiture of Miss Lesbanks and Miss Ducannon and the three Miss Marchfields, and

Mrs. Melville, the youthful widow of one of the late vicars choral.

For these ladies, who were all open to advances from Mr. Fabian, had been diligent members of the decorative committee for the last three or four years, indeed, ever since he came to the place ; and had entirely given themselves to the service of the church at such times as it needed decorating during the whole of that period, besides working cushions for the lectern, and embroidering altar-cloths, and various other necessities of ecclesiastical furniture, with untold patience and assiduity during the intervals. And it was a thing not to be tolerated that they, having thus, as it were, borne the burden and heat of the day, should be thrust out of their place in Mr. Fabian's estimation, and treated as if they were of no consideration whatever, for the sake of this little bit of a girl, scarcely out

of the school-room ; a girl to whom no man of sense would think of paying any serious attentions, even though she did happen to have a pretty face and a tolerable fortune, supposing people spoke the truth,—which, however, they seldom did—and a nice taking sort manner of about her ; if, indeed, frivolity and foolishness could be called attractive.

And so irreverent, too, as Miss Lesbanks said to Mrs. Melville, as the two ladies were standing together in the shadow of the pulpit, watching Miss Roda's proceedings in the chancel, where she and Mr. Fabian were flirting together over the evergreens. So very irreverent, evidently no sense at all of the respect due to the place ; skipping about there on the tessellated pavement with no more decorum than would have been suitable to an ordinary unconsecrated floor, and playing with the laurel leaves which Mr. Fabian

had cut away from the great cross over the altar, with as much indifference as though the cook at the Old Deanery had just thrown them out of one of her custards. And look ! Miss Lesbanks could scarcely believe her eyes, but she thought she was not mistaken.

Yes, Miss Montagu had made some of those very leaves into a wreath, and stuck it upon the head of St. Chad, the patron saint of the place, whose crumbling statue was placed over the vestry door ; and there she stood, laughing at it as though she had done something very grand.

Was ever such profanity seen or heard of ? And for Mr. Fabian to countenance it, too, as he evidently did, by joining in the laugh, instead of giving Miss Montagu a becoming reprimand, and making her understand that such behaviour as that would very soon put a stop to

the need of her services on such an occasion as the present. Mrs. Melville, and Miss Lesbanks, and the Miss Marchfields thought it was quite time for them to relinquish their connection with St. Chad's, if such irreverence as that was allowed in the presence of the very person whose duty it was to uphold the dignity of the church, and allowed, too, without so much as a rebuke being passed upon it; nay, even encouraged, and rewarded with a smile of approbation, whose like for sweetness and brightness had never yet been granted to any services of theirs. Mrs. Melville, and Miss Lesbanks, and Miss Marchfields thought they knew what they should feel themselves called upon to do, next time the St. Chad's decorative committee was requested to resume its labours of love.

Roda certainly had decked the venerable saint in a most Bacchanalian-looking wreath, not of

laurel, though, which contrasted oddly enough with his abbot's gown, and sandalled feet, and mitred brows. But Mr. Fabian could not have found it in his heart to scold her, even if she had taken the same liberty with his own priestly temples. The little neophyte looked so perfectly bewitching, there was such a bright natural freshness about her, so different from the studied manner and starched mien of most of the other Close young ladies. Roda might have what private opinions she chose relative to the beauty-heightening properties of white net dresses, and pearl sprays, and all the other appurtenances of ball-room attire; but certainly it would have been a difficult matter for her to look prettier in any other costume than she looked in that blue serge dress, guiltless of any ornament except the silver buttons which fastened it down the front, and the coquettish little black velvet

hat, whose long white feather showed off to still greater advantage the glossy blackness of her curls. And no background of ball-room drapery, or glitter of ball-room lights, could have set off the girlish freshness of her charms more effectually than that gloomy old church, with its damp-stained walls, its beamed roof of black oak, its mouldering columns, its sculptured capitals and bosses, its quaint old saints and martyrs, whose pale, meek faces, so full of mediæval repose, contrasted almost as strongly as death and life with this fair, fresh, rosy little maiden who stepped about beneath them, and whose artless smile seemed almost to make a sunshine in the place.

Roda did not keep all her smiles, though, for Mr. Fabian. She let fall a few, very bright and winning, upon Mr. Sparks, who, after he had finished his gallery decorations, came down,

attracted by her sweet voice and merry laugh, and offered his services to hold the other end of the festoon which she was trying to wind round the stem of the reading-desk. Roda accepted them very frankly, as, indeed, she accepted all that were offered to her that evening, much to the smothered indignation of Miss Bolte, who vowed, as Mr. Sparks hovered round his new favourite, that she would never come to another church decoration if Miss Montagu had anything to do with it. For Miss Montagu's was that bright, flashing style of beauty which killed every other ; just the same, she said, as a bonnet fresh from the milliner's hands quite puts into the shade one which has been cleaned, and altered, and dyed, and done up half a dozen times ; which figure, as Miss Bolte had been before the public for six successive county-balls, cleaned, and altered, and done up, in the same

style as the bonnet, was doubtless more truthful than agreeable.

And then one of the Ulphusby students requested of Mrs. Dexter an introduction to Miss Montagu, and begged, as the supremest favour, that he might be allowed to do something to help her. Could he not bring her a fresh stock of evergreens? Would she not allow him to assist her in tying up some laurel for a festoon? Were not those holly sprays too prickly for her little fingers, and would she not let him arrange them for her, whilst she stood by and directed him? To all of which requests Roda had something bright and pleasant to reply, something which caused the person who made them to feel as he had never felt before in his life, and to wish that he could contrive some excuse for staying by her all the rest of the evening. But of course he could not do that, and whilst

he was wondering how he might manage to keep where he was just a little longer, someone else came up with a request that Miss Montagu would be so very kind as to go with him to the other end of the church, and give him her opinion of the decoration he had been helping to put up there. And before Miss Montagu had been very long at the other end of the church, up came Mr. Sparks again, to ask if she would suggest something for the reading-desk. He was quite sure if she would only be so kind as to come for a minute or two, she could make it look so much prettier. And when, greatly to the discomfiture of the deserted cavalier, Mr. Sparks had got Roda away to the reading-desk, neither the memory of Ethel Brooke, nor the actual presence of Miss Bolte, who made some excuse for employing herself in the immediate vicinity, could prevent him from surrender-

ing himself to the fascination of that simple, unaffected, easy manner, which, as well as her beauty, made Roda so popular, and contriving plea after plea for staying by her until she was beguiled away by some fresh aspirant to her smiles.

Mr. Fabian thought that sort of thing might be carried on too far, when it was not carried on by himself; and so, under pretext of devising some fresh arrangement of garlands at the chancel end, he carried off his fair prize to that part of the church, and kept her there until Mrs. Dexter, who had promised to take care of her, was ready to go home. When she was gone, some of the decorative committee thought the best part of the evening's entertainment was over; but the ladies privately voted her departure a blessing. Because, they said, they were sure she knew a great deal more about flirtation

than about church decoration, and was much more skilful in getting compliments than in getting her festoons to hang with any sort of grace or elegance. Indeed, it was quite ridiculous, they said, the amount of help she required, and the number of people who were offering to show her how to do things which she ought to have learned to do for herself, before she presumed to come upon a committee like that. For their own part, they had no patience with a girl who required helping in everything she put her hand to, and who did not seem able so much as to arrange a leaf, or alter the set of a spray, unless she had two or three gentlemen to tell her how to do it. It was very easy to see what Miss Montagu came to the decoration for.

And then Mrs. Melville summoned Mr. Fabian to criticize her design for the front of the pulpit; and Miss Bolte asked the organist's appro-

bation of her altar-screen ; and Miss Ducannon inquired if one or two of the students would assist her in placing the cross over the west door ; and Miss Lesbanks called for someone to bring her a fresh supply of leaves, and hold them whilst she selected those that were best for use.

So the picturesque old church of St. Chad's got into its beautiful garments at last ; and Roda Montagu passed through what may be denominated the "little go" in her social university course. Before the last of these laurel leaves had faded, before Ethel Brooke's festoon in front of the organ-gallery had lost its pristine freshness, and Lucy's performances round the stone-font had fallen into shapeless decay, Roda would have come out into the great world of Ulphusby fashionable life, and taken into her own hands the sceptre which everyone said would be given so soon as she claimed it there.

CHAPTER XI.

THIS great event, Roda's introduction into society, took place under Mrs. Dexter's auspices, at a small quadrille-party, given by that lady a few days after the completion of the St. Chad's decorations.

Not a crush, by any means, as Mrs. Dexter took much pains to explain to Aunt Phillis and Dr. Montagu, who accompanied Roda on the eventful occasion. Nothing of the sort; for in her opinion it was so much better for a young girl to begin with something small and select, and so get accustomed, by degrees, to what was expected from her, before she entered upon the

more public gaieties of fashionable life. Therefore, Mrs. Dexter was only entertaining upon this occasion a few of her choicest friends, with cards and two or three quadrilles in the course of the evening; the whole to be wound up by a very elegant little supper in the breakfast and dining-rooms, which had been thrown together for that purpose, and decorated by one of the best upholsterers in Ulphusby.

Everything went off very successfully. Mrs. Dexter took care not to include in the list of her choice friends Mr. Sparks, the organist of St. Chad's, who had been observed to pay such very marked attentions to Miss Montagu during the progress of the decorations; nor yet the two or three students and the young gentleman in deacon's orders, who had been so persevering in their offers of assistance, and had mingled so many admiring glances with the sprays of ever-

green which they helped her to arrange in various parts of the church. Mrs. Dexter had her own ulterior aims in connection with Roda's introduction to the fashionable world, and it would have been a mere act of foolishness on her part to mar them by placing that young lady in the way of receiving further attentions from gentlemen who were already only too much disposed to make the best of their opportunities. If, after the pleasant easy intercourse which she had succeeded in establishing between her brother and Miss Montagu, and which the latter evidently enjoyed, Marcus used his advantages discreetly, her affections might easily be won, and in the course of a few weeks he might venture to speak to Dr. Montagu on the subject, without danger of appearing premature. But if, at the outset of her course, Roda was exposed to indiscriminate flattery, she might, even if her

heart was not occupied by any other rival, be less disposed to encourage Mr. Fabian's attentions. Some girls, and especially girls of warm, ardent temperaments, very soon got spoiled by that deference and attention which would be so freely lavished upon Dr. Montagu's daughter; and when once they got the notion into their heads that they could command any number of suitors, and just pick and choose where they liked, they became too independent, and sometimes repulsed with indifference those attentions which, had they been less conscious of their own charms, they would have welcomed thankfully. It would be well, then, to shelter her young friend from the dangers consequent upon a numerous train of admirers, and at the same time to place Marcus in a more favourable position for following up the advantages which he had already gained.

So reasoned Mrs. Dexter, wisely alive to her brother's matrimonial interests. And that was why neither the organist of St. Chad's, nor those particular Ulphusby students who had been manifestly smitten by Roda's charms, nor the young gentleman in deacon's orders, though all of them upon her visiting list, received notes of invitation to the elegant little entertainment with which the mistress of St. Ninian's Lodge inaugurated the festivities of the Close.

Avery Govan was there, though, with his sister Marian. He had come down to spend Christmas at home, and kindly condescended to accept Mrs. Dexter's invitation. Just, as he expressed it, to see once more how they managed such things as these at Ulphusby.

Avery had quite put on the air of a London man now, and expatiated upon people and things in the "provinces" with the patronizing

superiority of a dweller at the fountain-head of civilization. He informed Mrs. Dexter, as he gave her his arm through the rooms in the course of the evening, that he had declined two or three engagements in town that night, in order to give himself the pleasure of meeting her again.

“Private theatricals, and musical parties, and all that sort of thing, you know, that people in town bore a fellow with as soon as they find out that he has a little talent. But I’ve been obliged to make a stand against it, or I should never have an evening to myself, I declare.”

And Mr. Avery Govan put on an air of negligent indifference, as though to intimate that that sort of thing had become a complete nuisance now.

He really did look very handsome, almost distinguished—quite equal to any of the other

gentlemen who distributed their favours so lavishly amongst the ladies on the night of Mrs. Dexter's party. Marian overheard several people inquiring the name of "that fine looking young man with the black moustache," and felt quite proud of him. And, indeed, now that he had put off the last vestige of his northern accent, and cultivated the fashionable manners of London society, and come out in the latest style of Bond Street elegance, he was a man of whom, concerning his outward appearance and bearing, almost any woman would be proud to say, "He is my brother."

And though as yet he had been no very great stay to the family, and had taken out of its scanty purse more than he seemed likely at present to re-fund, still he was making his way surely, if not rapidly, towards some sort of consideration in the world. Even here, in aristo-

cratic little Ulphusby, amongst Mrs. Dexter's most select circle of friends, he was treated with marked respect, very different from the patronizing toleration which used to be extended towards the family when first they came to live in the old house in Ulphus Court. Marian felt as if his presence at St. Ninian's Lodge that night gave her a better position amongst the people who were there. They paid attention to her as his sister. She seemed to rise with him into esteem and consideration, and though she did not care much for this change so far as it affected herself, she looked at it as the prelude of success for him. This added social status was the needful stepping-stone to something more substantially valuable.

Marian was not deceived in her estimate of the deference which was paid to Avery. He was certainly receiving from these Ulphusby

people that consideration and almost respect which a man who has any knowledge of the world can generally command from those who see but little of it. Whether he was disposing his favours amongst the ladies—except Roda, who always snubbed him to the extent of her little ability—or chatting with Mr. Jukes, the Mayor of Ulphusby, about the measures which were passing the House, or enlightening Mr. Leadley, the exceedingly mild young curate of incipient ritualistic tendencies, as to the splendid ceremonials carried on in some of the metropolitan churches, so different, he said, from anything that could be got up in the provinces, or discussing the leading musicians of the day with Mr. Alison, who scarcely knew what to make of his ex-assistant, there was the same easy, assured air about him—the air of a man who feels himself up to the mark—quite capa-

ble, and, indeed, much more than capable, of meeting the requirements of any society in which he may be placed. A man who has that sort of confidence is sure to be popular, especially amongst women, who will tolerate almost anything in the person who is trying to make himself agreeable to them, except the hesitancy of self-distrust, and who will listen much more respectfully to one who talks with assurance of things about which he knows next to nothing, than to him who offers modestly reserved opinions concerning a subject with which he is still thoroughly acquainted.

Then young Mr. Avery's musical abilities were so very shining, just of the kind to ensure popularity in a drawing-room. And when he dashed off song after song, sometimes comic, sometimes sentimental, sometimes patriotic, and seemed to have all the fashionable music of the

season at his finger ends, Mrs. Dexter's guests were enraptured. He was really made for a professional singer. It was positively a shame that such brilliant gifts should be wasted in the obscurity of comparatively private life. *Why* did not Mr. Govan, they asked, come forward upon the stage or the orchestra? With his talents and his personal appearance, he would make a fortune there in a few years, at the very least. Mrs. Dexter was quite sure it was nothing but a modest distrust of his own merit—very praiseworthy, no doubt, but quite uncalled for, under the circumstances—which prevented him from becoming the leading native singer of the day, or even aspiring to the honours of the great Italian tenors, who were achieving such brilliant successes at the London opera-houses season after season.

Mr. Avery listened with the careless ease of

a man for whom all that sort of thing had become quite commonplace—in fact, almost a nuisance, if it was not uncourteous to apply such a term to the frequently-expressed congratulations of his admirers. And as he gracefully put away from him, or appropriated with such lofty self-possession the compliments which were showered upon him, how could Marian help feeling rather proud of her brother? How could she help a little secret satisfaction to see him thus taking the sparkle out of the gooseberry champagne of Ulphusby society, and almost eclipsing the fascinations even of the irresistible Mr. Fabian himself? And could her patient, much-enduring love be chided for accepting this in temporary stead of that true brotherly wisdom and support which she still kept on hoping and believing would come in its own time? He had always said,

when once he had got a position, he should be able to work his own way. He had got it now, and she could not think anything else of him than that he would improve it with all the industry and talent of which he was capable.

Of course, it was not to be expected, under the circumstances, that Avery Govan should be a very warm admirer of Roda's charms. Even if his acquaintance with the leading beauties of the London season had not quite unfitted him for the appreciation of provincial beauty, he had a lurking apprehension that the crystal-hearted little maiden took him for what he was worth; that she could see through all this assumption of cleverness, and fashion, and worldly intelligence, and recognise him for what in his better moments—and even Avery Govan had his better moments sometimes—he felt himself to be, a very weak, shallow, useless member

of society. He had felt those clear eyes, unclouded by the mist of loving charity which had so long dimmed Marian's, upon him when he was showing off his brilliant conversational powers to some enraptured Ulphusby belle; and he had seen the rosy lips take a bend of something very like contempt, and he was quite sure she was thinking of those lessons at eighteenpence an hour which he had refused to give for his sister, or of those long weary walks which she had taken to her teaching whilst he sat at home, folding his hands and smoking his cigars.

There are some men whose only ambition is to be known for what they are, and there are others whose life-purpose is to be known for what they are not. Avery belonged to the latter class, and whilst he had within him the consciousness that she knew him for what he really was, and took him at his true worth,

Roda might have had the charms of a Hebe, but he would not have bowed down to them. He very wisely kept at a safe distance from the bright eyes that could so easily look him through, and played off his social pyrotechnics where no damping shower of too personal remarks would be likely to interfere with their brilliance.

But if young Mr. Govan did not appreciate Roda's beauty on this, the night of its first public appearance, there were plenty who did. The gaily-pennoned little craft did not break away from her moorings and glide into open sea without much figurative waving of hats and handkerchiefs, much hurrahing and cheering as the waiting waves kissed with welcome spray the fair treasure which had just bounded into their embrace. Of course there were plenty of cruisers tacking about in the offing—such are

never wanting when both wealth and beauty are launched—with telescopes pointed and sails unfurled for chase, should chase seem desirable. But Mrs. Dexter had judiciously arranged that on this occasion they should get no further than the offing, so as to give that particular cruiser, in which she had a sisterly interest, a favourable start. For, as the wise commander of the launch said to her brother, when neither wind nor tide nor weather can be expected to exercise impartiality, everything depends upon a favourable start. So long as Marcus could keep a good league of waves and breakers between himself and those lurking cruisers, all would be well. There was no need to show overmuch eagerness of pursuit, at present. That might only defeat his purpose. Let him tack about gently, just keeping within sight. When the other vessels began to show signs of giving

chase, then would be the time for him to fire his guns, and run up the sails, and pipe hands up, and get his grappling irons ready, and begin to think about terms of surrender.

Marcus had been watching that pretty little craft now for nearly six months, as she lay in the harbour. He knew just how many bales of valuable merchandise lay stowed away in the hold, well-packed and safely insured. He knew every beam and timber, seasoned and seaworthy, from stem to stern. He had well assured himself that the bonnie vessel would sail safely, steadily on, when a few storms had dimmed the gaily-coloured flags, and sullied the whiteness of the now so unspotted canvas. Marcus had given chase to one or two other supposed prizes in his time, gallant barks, with swelling sails and flying colours, but he had found upon closer inspection that they carried all their beauty and

all their worth above board. When the pennons began to fade and the sails to lose their snowy whiteness, there was no rich freightage of scrip and funded property beneath, to redeem the faded splendour of the upper structure. Marcus thought that if the worst came to the worst, he would rather grapple with Miss Lesbanks, who, like some Dutch barge, square built, low-rigged, with a plenteous cargo of stocks and stupidity, and no top-colours at all, was plodding her slow unattended way across the open seas, than give chase to nothing but a gay pennon, and tug only a dainty figure-head into port.

Now, however, everything which he could desiderate was within his reach; cargo, seaworthiness, grace of build, beauty of finish. All he had to do was to keep within sailing distance, and have his grappling-irons ready for use when

the eventful moment arrived. That was what Marcus Fabian thought at the close of his sister's delightful Christmas quadrille party.

CHAPTER XII.

RODA came home feeling very bright and happy. Everything had been as pleasant as it could be, and all the people, except a few of the young ladies whom she had met before at the St. Chad's decorations, had been as kind as they could possibly be. She had danced, too, in nearly all the quadrilles, and had had so many pretty things said to her that she could not remember half of them. Then four gentlemen had come up all at once to take her in to supper, and twice as many had rushed away to fetch her cloak, and wrap it round her when the carriage was announced; and such very nice people kept

coming and talking to her, people who never went away until Mrs. Dexter came to fetch them—to talk to some one else, she supposed, for of course it was not fair that she should get all the attention. And Mr. Fabian had been so very polite, and had danced twice with her, for which she rewarded him by taking his arm when they went to supper. She wished she could have done it without refusing the others, because they seemed as if they did not like it very much; but she had asked Aunt Phillis, as they came home, if she had done right, and Aunt Phillis had said, yes, quite right; because, Mr. Fabian being Mrs. Dexter's brother, and acting as host, it was his place to pay that attention to her on the occasion of her first appearance in society. So Roda was content.

On the whole, she decided that a party was a pleasant thing, a very pleasant thing, and she

hoped that she should go to a great many more, now that she had once begun to go. Mrs. Dexter had said very kindly that she should be most happy to *chaperone* her, whenever Aunt Phillis did not feel equal to the excitement of mixing in society ; and as Aunt Phillis was getting into years now, and becoming more and more attached to a quiet life, it was not likely that she would be able to go out very much, and therefore Roda would probably be dependent upon Mrs. Dexter's kindly offices to a considerable extent. Most likely she should have some more invitations now ; several of the ladies, and a great many of the gentlemen, having said that they hoped they should have the pleasure of meeting her again before long. Roda was not quite sure that all the ladies meant what they said, they looked so very stiff and grand whilst they were saying it ; and the Miss Ducannons had

not even said they *hoped*, but only they supposed they should often be meeting her, now that she had come out. But she was sure that Mr. Fabian and the rest of the gentlemen meant it very much.

It was a tiring thing, though, to have to keep smiling, and talking, and dancing so long. She felt it quite a relief sometimes to get beside Marian Govan. Marian, who in her black gauze dress, with one or two white flowers in it, and her smooth light hair wrapped round her head in the Madonna style, looked so elegant, and even distinguished, amongst all the other grand ladies. Roda had never seen Marian in full dress before, and she did not think she could have looked so beautiful. Only there was such an atmosphere of quietness and seclusion about her. Going and sitting by her side was just the same, so Roda had often said to herself,

as turning into the Cathedral on a sunshiny summer day, you felt hushed and quieted directly.

Marian did not seem to enjoy the party very much. She did not dance more than once, and sat most of the time by Mr. Alison, talking to him, or some of the other Minster people. Roda thought her chief enjoyment was in seeing her brother admired. What a queer thing it was—and Roda gave her head an angry toss—that she never got out of patience with him for idling about as he did, and mixing up with all that grand company in London, and leaving her to toil on alone with the school, and the music-lessons, and the students, and her poor ailing mother! And then, as if that was not enough, to come down with his grand town airs, and his fine talk about Sir Somebody This, and Lady That, just as if the Ulphusby people were not

fit to be taken notice of now. How she did want to "walk into him," and tell him what she thought about him—that he was just a good-for-nothing dandy, and that she hated him as much as ever she could! He was the only black spot in the evening, the only person that made her think of it with anything like dissatisfaction.

And yet how glad the young ladies were to be talked to by him, and how they listened to his fine stories about town life, just as if it was such a very great honour that Mr. Avery should take the trouble of telling them. Roda did not know how things might appear when she had been as long in society as Miss Lesbanks, or the Miss Marchfields, but she knew very well now that she would not thank the finest gentleman in Ulphusby or London either, to talk to her as if he were conferring a favour upon her by doing

it. She thought the relations between men and women ought to be like what she had read of in the old troubadour ballads and romances, where the ladies sat in balconies, with their lutes and their embroidery, and pages holding up their trains for them ; whilst the knights stood under the balconies, singing ballads to them, thinking of course that the ladies conferred the honour by listening to what they had to sing, and not that they put any honour upon the ladies by taking the trouble to sing it. Roda would have to modify her ideas about the relations of men and women, as well as her ideas upon many other subjects, before she had worn that pretty evening dress of hers many more times. She would find out that customs have altered considerably since the good old troubadour times, when knights brought their homage to the balconies, and thought themselves fortunate in being al-

lowed to offer it. And that the ladies now, unless they have very well-filled purses, and very beautiful faces, are expected to do the homage themselves, if it gets done at all ; or, instead of sitting in their balconies and having it brought to them, must go into society and earn it there with much expenditure of dress and fascination, and a very great deal of gratitude too, if, after all, they succeed in obtaining it.

Whilst Roda was turning over such thoughts as these in her own mind, a night or two after Mrs. Dexter's quadrille-party, Marian Govan and her brother were having a quiet talk together before he went back to London.

He was sketching out his plans for the next year or two—Avery had a wonderful gift for sketching out plans—and telling her how well he had succeeded already in establishing a position. He must acknowledge it had been rather

an expensive thing going into company so much, and keeping up with everything that was stirring in the world, as a man must make up his mind to do if he meant to get on at all ; and he was afraid he should have to trouble her just once more, if she could manage to spare him a few pounds, to keep him on his feet a little longer, until he got rid of some quadrilles that he had not been successful yet in making a good bargain for.

“I didn’t mean to have asked you for anything this time, Marian,” he said, trying to look careless and unconcerned about it, as they sat there by the fire after Mrs. Govan had gone to bed ; “I quite made up my mind to fight for myself, and be no trouble to anybody, when I once got started in London. But this has been such an awfully slow season in London—everybody says there hasn’t been such a slow season

for years, and it's almost impossible to get anything off your hands for a reasonable price. Music doesn't go up just now, somehow. In fact, one or two of the publishers have been obliged to pay off some of their best quadrille hands, in consequence of business being so flat. And then when a fellow gets bad luck night after night—”

Here Avery caught his words up hastily.

“I mean, when a fellow can't get his price, it seems to take the pluck out of him. You don't know, Marian, living here so comfortably as you do, and nothing to worry you, what a fellow has to battle against in London.”

“Bad luck,” repeated Marian, and she thought of her own fruitless efforts when first they came to settle at Ulphusby. How time after time she had called upon people who had made application to her about sending their children, and

been unsuccessful; and how many a weary mile she had trudged in quest of music-teaching, or to inquire after someone who would be likely to take rooms with them. "Bad luck, Avery?—then have you not been able to dispose of your music? Is that what you mean?"

"Of course it is," said Avery pettishly. "What else do you suppose it is, if it isn't that? What do you look at me for, as if you thought it was something else? You women are always suspecting something."

Marian was innocent enough of suspicion, only she wondered why Avery should take up her words so ill-naturedly. But perhaps it was the result of his disappointment at not being able to dispose of the quadrilles he had taken so much trouble to prepare. She had noticed, since he came home this time, that his temper was not quite so even as it used to be. She

was sorry she had said anything to grieve him, for he must have much to bear with, living there alone, no one to cheer him when he got down or discouraged. It was a bitter thing—she had known a little of it herself—to be willing to work hard, and then find no room to work. She told him that he had quite misunderstood her in fancying that she suspected anything.

“I never said that you did suspect anything, only you looked as if you did, and that’s just as bad. But I tell you what it is, Marian, I don’t think I shall trouble myself about composition any longer. It’s a risky thing for a fellow to depend upon, especially when there happens to be such a confoundedly slow season as this. And I’ve some thoughts of going before the public in the singing line. That sort of thing pays first-rate when once a fellow gets his name

known; and with my voice—" here Avery stretched himself, and threw out his broad chest—" with my voice I should make a living of it in no time, when once I got fairly started. I've had it suggested to me over and over again, before Mrs. Dexter said anything about it at that little bit of a crush the other night, and I begin to think I'm doing myself an injustice not to give it a trial. It's so much easier, you know, than composition. Why, there are half a dozen young fellows in my set who can earn their twenty pounds a week, with voices not nearly up to mine, and so I've about decided to turn my attention to that sort of thing. It won't pay just at first, perhaps, because a fellow must give himself time to get known in that line, the same as any other; but if you don't mind giving me a helping hand a little bit longer, though of course I'm aware that I've

been drag enough upon you already——” And Avery put on an injured look, as if someone had been using him very badly.

“No, no,” said Marian, earnestly, “I’m sure you haven’t been a drag upon us. I never once looked at it in that light, and it will be a real pleasure to me to help you as long as ever I can. Don’t say that again, Avery.”

“Well, I won’t say it, if it doesn’t please you ; only I’ve thought that you seemed a bit screwy when I’ve asked you for a lift sometimes, as if you didn’t take into account how hard I was working under old Alison, and that I’d been no expense to you in being sent to college, or anything of that sort. But I’m ready to forgive it, and shake hands again, for nobody could ever say it of me that I was a fellow to bear malice, though I know Alison did tell a precious lot of stories to you about my not giving the choristers

their proper time, and missing their lessons now and then when I felt seedy in a morning. If you cared as much for me as you always professed to do, I don't see why you need have listened to him."

"Avery, you know I could not help listening to him, but I am sure I never thought that you really did neglect your work, and I don't remember that I said anything about it to you."

"No, you didn't. I should soon have given you your change if you had. That's the sort of thing I never would put up with, to be set straight by a woman. But, as I told you, I don't want to bear malice, and so you'll just lend me that twenty pounds until I get the quadrilles off my hands. It will keep me going a week or two, at any rate, and settle those confounded fellows that lost me—I mean those tradesmen's accounts, and all that sort of nui-

sance. Because you see, Marian, living in London is altogether a different thing to being settled down in a quiet place like this, where you've no sort of trouble or anxiety of any kind, nothing but just to make yourself comfortable. It takes a fellow's spirit out of him, and empties his purse pretty quickly, I can tell you, does living in London. I don't know that I made exactly a good move to go there at all, only it was your doing."

"Nay, Avery," said Marian, beginning to feel as if her brother was going a little too far, and yet scarcely knowing if the blame did belong to her which he rolled so easily away from himself—"I am sure it was not I who wanted you to go to London."

"No, I daresay you didn't want me to go, because you thought I should cost you a little more, and you always had such a keen eye for

your money ; but you let me down so here in Ulphusby with keeping that little school, and having people to lodge in the house, and then going out to give eighteenpenny lessons, as you did. It makes a fellow that he can't settle when he feels that his mother and sister are let down. It wasn't likely I could stop here and feel that you were keeping me from the position I ought to take."

"What should I have done, Avery?" asked Marian, calmly.

"Done!—why, you should have—I don't know *what* you should have done; but you shouldn't have gone and let us all down in that way, and made me feel as if I couldn't stay in the place. I could have made a good enough thing of it with old Alison, if only it hadn't been for the way you injured my position. You ought to have drawn out all the capital,

and let us lived genteelly upon that, until I started with my teaching, and got a decent living for us all. *That's* what you ought to have done !”

“Then why did you not suggest it at first ?”

“Confound you, Marian !” and Avery dashed up and down the room two or three times, and then threw himself back again into his chair. “you’ll drive me mad if you keep going on in that way ! What’s the use, when a thing is done, of making a fuss about it ? It’s your fault—everything is your fault ; and I know as well as can be you’ve grudged me every penny that I’ve spent in London, although I’ve been working like a horse to get myself a position—I have, indeed !”

Avery changed his tone now to one of injured innocence.

"I'm a good-hearted fellow at the bottom, Marian, though you don't give me credit for it. Things might have been very different if you'd always given me credit for what I deserved. There's nothing takes the pluck out of a fellow, Marian, like not giving him his proper credit."

Again Marian protested her innocence of anything like scepticism as to her brother's deservings, and assured him that if she ever had appeared to look coldly upon any project of his, it was only because the anxieties of her daily life sometimes made her feel as if she could not look very brightly upon anything. She had it in her heart, she said, to serve him to the very uttermost of her power. And then she bade him cheer up, and try again, and not be discouraged if things did seem to go against him. For, as she said, there was something

for everyone to bear, and people who had to face the world for themselves, as they two had to face it, must expect some hard rubs now and then ; and even if they were cast down sometimes for a little while, it was no wonder.

“But I am quite sure of this, Avery, that so long as we do our duty, and put our trust in God, we shall in some way be taken care of, and brought at last to the light. Only let us do the best we can.”

Avery interrupted her hastily. He generally did if she got into what he called the preaching line. He took up his candle and went to bed, with the air of a very ill-used man, quite a different air to that which he had worn a night or two ago in Mrs. Dexter's drawing-room, whilst he was making himself so very agreeable to the young ladies there, moving them all to think what a very fascinating young gentleman

he was, and how they wished *they* had such a brother.

But in truth Avery's visit, especially the last day or two of it, had been anything but a satisfactory portion to his sister. He had seemed so restless and ill at ease, always taking the wrong side of anything that was said to him, and appearing to be on the watch for suspicion or accusation. He had almost given up talking now about being a stay to the family. Instead of looking onward and trusting to the future, he was more disposed to look back and grumble over the past. Everything was against him, he said. He wished he had never gone to London. It was all his sister's doing. If she had not let them down with her teaching, he should have been able to stay at home and get a decent living for them all, instead of slaving up there alone, and getting into——

But there Avery stopped, and never said what it was that he got into.

In vain Marian suggested that he might come back and settle at Ulphusby again. Mr. Alison had not got another assistant; he might take his old work and form a good teaching connection, just the same as he expected to do when he first came to the place. It was no use, he said; he must go back and fight his way through, somehow, in London. He could not bury himself in Ulphusby again, after he had once known what the excitement of town life was. Only, as Marian had been the means of getting him there, she must find the means of keeping him afloat until he was able to do something for himself. It was unjust, he said, that a fellow should be forced out into a place that he was never intended for, and then expected to make his way there, just as if he had always been

brought up to it. And she must not think, therefore, that she was doing him such a very great favour if she lent him money that he should never have wanted if it had not been for her foolishness in urging him into the position where he was now.

Next morning Marian brought out the money which she had laid aside to pay the doctor's bill, and gave it to him. Then he set off again to London. Life had changed very much for both of them before he came back to the old house in Ulphus Court any more.

CHAPTER XIII.

HITHERTO Marian had worked on patiently and hopefully. Nay, even at times there had been a sort of brightness in her toil, for she felt that it was appreciated and rewarded by the kindly feeling towards her of those for whom she toiled. There was not much of what people call happiness in her life, and very little as yet of the sunshine, which, sooner or later, comes to most. But if she missed the happiness, she missed also the unrest which comes when that happiness is taken away; and if the sunshine fell upon her even more sparingly than upon those old lichened roofs in Ulphus Court, she

never knew that ineffectual sense of want which follows overmuch brightness, as surely as night follows the day.

A woman who sees her duty lying clearly, plainly before her, and has the will to do it, whose path, though straight and unflowery, has yet no vexing briars of difficulty to be put away, can never be unhappy. Her feet may stumble sometimes over that narrow path, but they will never fall. Her hands may hang down, weary with their weight of care, but they will never be lifted up to heaven in that dumb agony which is the soul's deepest prayer. Plain duty, and clear light to do it by, if they can never fill and content any human heart, will always strengthen it, even unto the end.

But now there had come into Marian's life a tinge of bitterness—a dim sense of injustice and wrong, together with an inability to see the

right way through the conflicting interests which lay before her ; and, most painful of all, a half-formed fear of something hanging over their home—something which no care or forethought of hers could keep away. That visit of Avery's had left a very sad feeling behind it. For the first time she began to admit to herself the chance of his failure. Hitherto she had kept up a brave faith in him. All his changeableness, his ill success, his lack of definite aim and purpose, she had attributed to a rich overflow of natural energy, which could not find the right channel for its strength. Once having found that, it would go steadily on, no disappointment nor opposition being able to check, but only increasing the force of its progress.

Having this hope within her, she had borne very patiently with her brother's instability. She had readily taken up his various plans, and

forwarded them to the best of her power. When, after their father's death, he had appeared so eager to come to Ulphusby in order that he might put himself under the instruction of Mr. Alison, and make a fair start in the musical profession, she had contrived everything for him, and arranged their home so that his studies might be pursued pleasantly, and without interruption there. When he began to turn distastefully from the dull routine of teaching, and devote himself to a higher branch of his art, she had yielded to that too, and cheerfully borne the extra work which it laid upon herself. When, again, he grew restless, and chafed under the monotony of Ulphusby life, and wanted to push his fortunes in a wider sphere, she still had given up her own plans for his, and toiled harder than ever, that she might place in his hands enough to enable him to

bring that wish also to its accomplishment. Now a fresh impulse had caught him up. He was wanting to try another new line of life. The months and years, as they slowly wasted away, were bringing him no nearer to that definiteness and unity of purpose which is a man's true glory in life. Behind him lay nothing but scattered fragments, which he could never now turn back again to gather up. Before him lay material enough, even yet, but he brought to it neither the will, nor the determination, nor the energy any more, which could hew out of it worthy deeds, and build them up day by day into that house not made with hands, a noble, useful, self-denying life.

Yes, she knew too truly now that the purpose and the resolution were wanting. Since the long conversation which she had with Avery just before he went back to London, that dim

fear had been strengthening into a certainty. It was no use looking to her brother any more for that stay and support, to find which had been the one great longing of her life. She might toil for him still, that privilege he would never deny her. She might give of the labour of her hands to minister to his ease and comfort, but she must never again look forward to years of coming rest, years when she might take from him what now he took from her, and when all her care for him should be given back with sweet interest of tenderness and love.

The time was come for her now to face that truth, surely the sharpest, bitterest truth a woman ever can face, that the one whom she loves as her own life, is—not unworthy of that love, for a true-hearted woman, even in her sorest disappointment, will seldom own to that—but incapable of valuing or appreciating it; set

apart from her, not by ill-doing or actual sin, but by the never-to-be-bridged-over gulf of a separate, distinct, less noble nature, a nature which can no more touch her own, or feel with its feeling, or be stirred with its inspirations. To take up that knowledge and carry it all through life is a heavy burden. Now for the first time Marian began to feel its weight.

She knew it was of no use to take counsel of her mother in this new difficulty. Indeed it was her daily effort now to keep back the look of care from her face, so to hide away this sharp particular grief behind an aspect of customary calm, that Mrs. Govan should not suspect any cause of anxiety. Her very life depended upon perfect quietness of mind. To tell her of Avery's vague purposeless ways, to sweep away the hope, whose realization she never dreamed of doubting, that he would one day be the prop of

her feeble age, would have been to kill her at once. Marian must talk to her brightly, hopefully, as usual. She must dwell upon his successes, if he told them of any more, as sure harbingers of victory at last, and hide away his failures as best she could, and supply from her own scanty earnings the demands which kept ever increasing as her means of meeting them appeared to diminish. All anxiety that she had to bear on her brother's behalf must be borne, in its real bitterness, by herself alone.

The only person to whom she could tell any of her troubles was Miss Chickory, dear, kind, unselfish Miss Chickory, who had a loving word for everybody, and who had such a wholesome way of looking on the bright side of things, that without doing it of set purpose, she always seemed to cheer those who came to her in any sort of need or sorrow. Though, even to Aunt

Phillis, she could not tell all ; only a little, a very little, of that care which seemed now to be eating the comfort out of her life. Still, to get a kind look and a helpful word or two, even though these went but a little way below the surface, would be something.

So to the Old Deanery she went, not very long after Mrs. Dexter's party. Miss Chickory felt a sort of personal responsibility in Avery Govan's welfare, having been, as she considered herself, the means of bringing the family to settle at Ulphusby, and so introducing him to the set of people who had put into his head this new notion about establishing himself in London. She was very much concerned, therefore, to hear that the young man was not getting on quite so well in every respect as they could desire, not making his way very successfully in a pecuniary point of view, or appearing likely to

become a help to the family, if Mrs. Govan's failing health rendered it needful that Marian should give up other employments to take the entire charge of her. Still, however, she was not inclined to despair of his prospects, even yet.

"My dear," she said, and Marian thought it was almost worth being in trouble to hear her cheery voice, and to see the kindly smile with which she spoke the words—"my dear, you must not be discouraged. He is only young, not two-and-twenty until sometime next month, if I remember rightly; and there is plenty of hope for him yet, if only he keeps on steadily, and sets before himself something which he is determined to reach."

"If only," thought Marian to herself, but she said nothing.

"Something which he is determined to reach,"

continued Aunt Phillis. "So long as a young man knows what he is working at, and has health and strength for it, his friends need never be in despair about him. Why, my dear, at two-and-twenty, Dr. Montagu was entirely dependent upon his parents—you know, young men at college are not in the way of helping themselves much, even if they have the wish to do it—entirely dependent upon his parents for every penny, and look where he is now. Just look where he is now, my dear."

And Aunt Phillis, with a pardonable pride in her brother-in-law, who had been what the world calls a very successful man, glanced around the luxuriously-furnished room, with all its appliances of ease and comfort, its well-filled book-cases, its store of plate gleaming from the massive sideboard, its choice pictures and bronzes, its aspect of liberal, unstinted English respect-

ability. "Look where he is now, and don't be afraid for your dear brother."

"Not," said Aunt Phillis—and there came a reverent look over her face—"not that I consider such things as these to make a man's success in life, or that I should think your brother had got on well if he gathered round him only a comfortable home and plenty of money to keep it going. You know as well as I do, Marian, that a man may live in a two-roomed lodging, as perhaps Avery does now, and be very rich in all that makes a beautiful life; or he may have a much more luxurious house than this, and be very, *very* poor. And I hope, whatever else your dear brother makes of life, he will make it successful in ministering to him an abundant entrance into the better one that lies beyond it."

Aunt Phillis rather stumbled over these latter

sentences, as she generally did when she got out of the sphere of everyday matters into that of ethics or philosophy. Only the earnest thoughtfulness with which she said what she felt it her duty to say about a man's life consisting not in the abundance of the things which he possesses, made up for any hesitation in the manner of saying it. She got along better, however, when she came back again to her more usual track.

“What I mean is this, you know, that you must not be cast down too soon because Avery finds it a difficult thing to make his way in the world; and you are not to think, even if he never gets beyond a very moderate income, that he has failed to accomplish what he was sent into this world for. So take heart, Marian, and don't you go and write to him as if there was no hope left. Remember at two-and-twenty a man has a long life before him—

at least, so far as that can be said of anyone. And pray tell him—will you?—from me——”

Here Aunt Phillis hesitated again, almost as much as she had done when she ventured into ethics.

“Tell him, if you please, from me, that if he should at any time feel at all straitened—and we know that is sometimes the case, even when a young man is working as hard as he can—tell him that either Dr. Montagu or myself will do anything for him. You know what I mean, my dear, that he is not to lose any advantage for want of means that we should be so glad to supply. Will you say this, if you think there is any need for it? And tell him that if he only perseveres, all will be well; I am quite sure all will be well.”

Again Marian sighed at the mention of that “if only,” and crushed down the deep longing

which she felt to tell Aunt Phillis everything. A few weeks ago those kind, tender words, would have covered all her needs. Not so now. Not so any more, perhaps. It was as when a skilful physician prescribes for a trifling wound, and knows not of the hidden canker which is slowly eating its way to the very life. She could not bring herself yet to confess that her brother Avery carried within himself the germs of his own failure, that no care of hers could save him, no help so willingly reached out by the hand of friendship, keep him, except for a little season, from that slow downward road, which, once entered upon, is so seldom left for any other. That was a grief she could only tell to One. Still it was a rest to know that here, at least, was some one whom she could trust, some one to whom she could tell a little of her anxiety without feeling that

she was laying a burden heavy to be borne on one who was unable to carry it.

And then there was Roda, looking so bright and happy and merry. It was always as good as getting out into the open air of a summer day to look into Roda's face, and come within sound of her clear, ringing laugh. If for Roda to shelter herself by Marian Govan's side was like coming from city noise and tumult into the dim shadow of a cathedral,—for Marian to clasp Roda's hand, and hear her sweet voice, was like getting out of that same cathedral, when its gloom had over-saddened her, into the light and sunshine again. There seemed such an overflow of vitality about her, a superabundant life from which others, almost ready to dry up and disappear, might be refreshed and filled again once more.

Roda was even brighter than usual on this

occasion of Marian's visit to the Old Deanery. There had been a letter from Alec that very morning, to prepare them for his return in two or three weeks. His examinations were all over now, and his honours won, and his certificates duly signed and sealed ; nothing was left but for him to wind up his affairs, and pay his college bills, and then come to Ulphusby to settle down again for a fresh spell of work there.

“Only two weeks, Marian,” said Roda, her eyes sparkling with undisguised pleasure, as Aunt Phillis dived into her capacious pocket for the Frankfort letter, and read Alec's humorous description of his closing examinations in presence of the wizened old professors — “only two weeks, and perhaps not so much as that, even ; because, you hear, he says he may be able to get off almost any day now ;

but, at any rate, it cannot be more than two weeks, and then you will really see him for yourself, this wonderful Alec, that you have heard about so often. I wonder what you will think about him? I hope you will say he is very nice, because I shall be so dreadfully disappointed if you don't like him. Although, you know, he is just as different to you as ever he can be—but perhaps that will make you like him all the better. People often do like other people just because they are different to themselves.”

Roda had very often talked to Marian Govan about Alec, and extolled his “niceness,” which seemed to be the only word she could find to compress into a sufficiently small compass the whole wide circle of his agreeable qualities. But lately, since that quiet little evening at Mrs. Dexter's, she had not been quite so elo-

quent in her admiration of him; what encomiums she had to bestow upon her friends being chiefly turned in the direction of Mr. Fabian. Over and over again, within the last few months, she had privately informed Marian that Mr. Fabian was "very nice," indeed she thought he was almost the nicest person she had ever seen. And there was such a pretty tinge of consciousness in her manner when she mentioned his name, mingled with a touch of saucy independence, as much as to imply that, although he might be very nice, it was not of the slightest consequence to her, that Marian, who had not yet fathomed Roda's wilful little heart, thought that Mr. Fabian's star was decidedly in the ascendant, and that Mrs. Dexter's devices which she *had* fathomed, were likely to arrive at a triumphant issue. There was no such tinge of pretty consciousness, no such dash of saucy

independence in her manner when she talked of Alec Ianson. Rather, Marian thought, he seemed to be as an elder brother, who had kindly let himself down from some superior height to romp and play with her, when as yet she was little more than a child.

“Such fine fun, Marian, as we used to have when Alec was here,” Roda began when Aunt Phillis had put the letter away again. “There never was anyone who could get the sport out of Jeff and Lily that he used to get. And then the races; you know he always ran backwards and I ran forwards, and yet I couldn’t beat him even in that way—he went so fast. Only, of course,” and there came a quaint little touch of dignity into Roda’s manner—“of course I shall not run races with him now, because I am a young lady, and then I was only a little girl. There are a great many things we used to do

then, which Aunt Phillis would not think it proper for me to do, now that I am out in society. And then I daresay he will be very much altered too. Papa says that a year and a half on the Continent makes a great difference in a young man. I wonder if he will be as handsome now as Mr. Fabian, and if he will have such very nice ways about him? Aunt Phillis says Mr. Fabian is very gentlemanly indeed, and I think so too ; but still——”

Roda got no further, for just then the servant came in with a note for her. It was from Mrs. Falconer, the Dean's lady, inviting her to a party which was to take place at the Deanery in the course of the month. There was the magic word “dancing” in the corner.

Roda read it with great delight. It was the fourth invitation she had had since her first introduction at St. Ninian's Lodge, a fortnight

ago. Her papa had laughingly said that he must put a stop to this sort of thing, or his little girl would have her head completely turned with so much flattery and flirtation; and Aunt Phillis had begun to complain that the excitement even of thinking about so many parties was too much for her poor old brains. She did not rest properly for three whole nights after Mrs. Dexter's ball, and as for the party which Dr. Montagu said they must give at the Old Deanery, in return for all Roda's invitations, it was a greater incubus upon her mind than even the Communion seasons used to be when she kept house for her brother, the late minister of Cath-Ross, before he was married.

"But you'll let me go, Aunt Phillis? You don't mean to say that you're going to be such a stupid old aunt as to tell me that I am not to accept an invitation to the *real* Deanery?" said

Roda, getting out her dainty little writing-desk, and searching for those tiny sheets of cream-laid which had been so much in request of late for acceptances of the Close hospitalities. "And besides, you know, Mrs. Dexter is sure to be going, and she said she would always take care of me when you did not feel equal to visiting. So please to say that I may go if I like?"

And Roda came and looked straight into Aunt Phillis's face, with one of her sweetest, sauciest smiles. It would have needed a harder heart than Miss Chickory possessed to resist such a smile, or to turn away from those rosy lips which were bent down to kiss away any lingering scruples as to the propriety of this continued round of dissipation.

"Yes, yes, child, you may go if you like. I am sure your papa and I both of us want you

to enjoy yourself as much as you can in moderation."

Away Roda bounded to her desk again, and little Fits was soon on his way to the Deanery with an acceptance of Mrs. Falconer's invitation.

"But then my dress, Aunt Phillis?" she began again, when Marian and Miss Chickory were getting into conversation about a student who would be likely to engage rooms in the Ulphus Court house. "You know I can't go in my dress that I had for Mrs. Dexter's party, because I shall have worn it four times already, before the nineteenth. And I am sure that is often enough to wear a white frock, even if you do have a fresh lot of trimmings for it every night. I've never seen the Miss Ducannons in the same dresses yet, though I've met them three times. Once they had maize, and another

time mauve, and another cerise, all as ugly as they could be ; but still, you know, it was a difference. And so, Aunt Phillis, you'll let me have a new dress ? Just like Marian's that she wore at Mrs. Dexter's party, only white instead of black ; and green frosted leaves to loop up the tunic. Now, say yes, Aunt Phillis—*do* say yes. I shall think you are the crabbiest old aunt that ever was, if you don't say yes."

And Roda clapped her hands with delight to think how resplendent she should look at Mrs. Falconer's party in a white gauze dress, with a tunic looped up with frosted green leaves, and perhaps frosted leaves in her hair too, and her poor mamma's jewelled fan fastened by a golden chain to her waist, as she had been allowed to wear it for Mrs. Dexter's party.

Aunt Phillis said "yes" again, only stipulating that papa must be consulted this time. She

could scarcely have said no, if the child had asked for gold and silver tissue. She loved so to see that flush of sparkling happiness, and to feel Roda's warm soft kisses showered for reward upon her old face. She remembered the time, though very far back now, when the promise of a new dress would have made herself almost the happiest girl in the world, and she was willing that Roda should have her share of the same joy, as long as it could last.

"And then, you know," as Miss Chickory pleaded to Marian, who, half sad, half amused, was listening to it all, "she can only be young once."

Marian said that was very true. And she could not help thinking, too, that if every girl's youth brought half such weight of care as she had found in her own, it was a mercy that it could only come once.

CHAPTER XIV.

AS soon as Roda got permission to have the dress, she went off into a discussion as to the amount of white gauze which would be required for it, and never came back again to that disquisition upon the respective merits of Alec Ianson and Mr. Fabian, whose progress was interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. Falconer's note. Perhaps if it had been resumed, and if she could have given utterance to her real sentiments on the subject, some trouble might afterwards have been spared both to herself and others; but that was not for her to foresee.

It was not until she had persuaded Aunt

Phillis to go with her and order the dress, and had made all needful arrangements about the tunic and the frosted leaves, that she settled down to a spell of meditation on the contents of the Frankfort letter which had arrived that morning; and which had kept sending up now and then its own little jets of private satisfaction, even above that bubbling spring of vanity and frivolity, as some people might feel inclined to call it, which the prospect of another fashionable entertainment had unsealed in her fond, foolish, affectionate little heart.

So Alec was coming back. Coming *home*, as she always called it to herself; for she liked to think that Ulphusby would be home to him now, for at least a whole long year. Of course he would stay at the Old Deanery, and go every day to his classes at the college, as the other students did who had apartments in the town.

And the classes did not take up so very much time either, and surely after he had been working so hard for eighteen months, under those Frankfort professors, he would not need to study so closely as though he had everything to learn from the very beginning. At any rate, there would be the long evenings, when they might read and talk and play, and she would sing to him, for people told her she could sing very beautifully now; and perhaps he would tease her a little, for it was scarcely likely that he would quite have got over his love for that sort of thing. Indeed, he would not seem like the real Alec of old times, if he did not play her some funny tricks now and then, just to keep up the old feeling. Roda laughed to herself at the thought of having her hair all pulled down now, and tied with bits of red tape, after the fashion of the Indian squaws; or spangled over with

gold-coloured gelatine wafers, as he had spangled it one day, and then told her she would do for a model of a Circassian maiden. It was a dreadfully long process getting the wafers out of her hair again, but it was worth the trouble to be told that she was like a Circassian, for she had learned in some of her geographical lessons that the Circassian maidens were remarkable for their beauty, and of course that was what Alec meant when he told her she was like one of them. She should never get vexed though, now, when he teased her. She was too old to go into a temper over it, and say she hated him, or any such foolish nonsense. She should only laugh very much, and make a joke of it, and certainly not let him have the pleasure any more of seeing how she looked when she was crying. And then, although she *was* nearly eighteen, she thought they might perhaps have a race now

and then in the garden, when old Fits was safely out of the way ; that is, if Alec proposed such a thing himself. She did not mean to say anything about it, only be ready to join in just as pleasantly as ever, if he did. Eighteen was not so very old, after all ; and Aunt Phillis had said many times that she did not wish her to lay aside all her girlish amusements, only to enjoy them in moderation.

She wondered if he really would be just the same as when he went away, eighteen months ago. Of course he would be altered in his outward appearance—she was quite prepared for that. His beard and moustache, that he used to think so much about, and take so much care of, would have grown very much thicker, quite enough, without anything else, to make a great difference in him ; and he would most likely have a German accent, and perhaps a little touch of

outlandishness in his costume and manners, after being for more than a year and a half amongst the Frankfort students, who, if all he told her about them was true, must be a very queer lot of people. But that was not at all what she meant. She wondered if she should be able to feel just the same to him when he came back again ; if she should have the same sense of perfect happiness and contentment as she had when they were walking up and down the garden that September morning, just before he went away. Yes, for though he was going away, and she knew that she could see him no more for what seemed to her then such a long, long time, still she felt that somehow they belonged to each other ; there was something that kept him close to her, and that kept her close to him, even though so many miles would separate them. She felt then that even if he were going to the

other side of the world, instead of just across to Germany, it would not have made very much difference. It was nothing connected either with his going or staying that made her so happy then—it was just the beautiful thought that he cared for her, and wanted her to care for him and remember him.

She had done that faithfully enough. She had never knelt down to say her prayers, not even after that first grand party at Mrs. Dexter's, without mentioning Alec's name, asking that he might be kept from all harm and mischief, and brought back to them again, just the same Alec, bright, and kind, and loving, as when he went away.

And now he really *was* coming back. Though she had thought about it so long, and pictured it to herself so many, many times, still it brought a strange feeling with it when it was actually

close at hand. She wondered how they should meet each other, and what they should say. She was sure she should feel very awkward, just at first, until she had been able to find out whether he was indeed quite the same. She must be wiser this time than she was that other afternoon when he came back unawares and dropped that full-blown rose upon her face, as she lay upon a heap of dry leaves in the garden. She must not seize hold of both his hands, and say again—“Oh! Alec, I *am* so glad you are come back!” even though she might feel it quite as much as she did then, and perhaps a great deal more. She must only be kind and pleasant, and tell him they were very pleased to see him at the Old Deanery again; and then she would begin to ask him what sort of a journey he had had, and whether he had suffered very much from sea-sickness, and how he liked Germany, and

what accounts he had had from home lately, and all that sort of thing, which was quite fit and proper to say to anyone. But for all the rest she must wait until the old remembered look, and something she knew so well, but could not explain, even to herself, much less to anyone else, in the tone of his voice, told her that it was really Alec, the very same Alec who had gone away a year and a half ago, and that they belonged to each other now in just the dear old happy way as they had when they stood together by the Virginian creeper, and said those words about remembering each other always.

After that how very, very pleasant it would be!

These sweet thoughts came nestling into Roda's heart as she sat on a low seat, quiet as any little mouse, between her papa and Aunt Phillis, who were having their usual after-dinner

nap, on the evening of the day when Mrs. Falconer's invitation arrived. That after-dinner nap was generally a fine season of meditation for Roda, if she did not contrive to get safely away to some other part of the house before it began. Nothing put Dr. Montagu out of temper so much as being disturbed when once he had settled down to a snooze in that great, softly-cushioned easy-chair, with a decanter of port and a wine-glass at his elbow. As for Aunt Phillis, she never professed to go to sleep after dinner, because, having so little to do, it seemed too much like self-indulgence. So she used to take her book or her work, and make a great show of being absorbed in something useful; but by-and-by the dear old head would begin to droop a little on one side, and the click of the needles ceased, and the hands fell quietly upon her lap, and a very, very deep breath, if

not an actual snore, announced the peaceful termination of Miss Chickory's employments for the next half hour, at any rate. Roda knew there was no such thing as getting out of the room when once her papa's snooze had commenced, and accordingly she used to settle herself down before the fire, with her elbows on her knees, and her chin on her hands; but it was a great relief to her, not having much talent for silence, when the Doctor began to wink and stretch himself, and indulge in one or two resonant yawns by way of intimating his return to consciousness. And she used to think, sometimes, how pleasant it would be, when Alec had come back, for them both to steal into the drawing-room, as soon as dinner was over, and have a diet of fun there on their own account, whilst the heads of the family were having a diet of snoring in their respective easy-chairs.

The time did not seem so long this afternoon, though. That Frankfort letter had given her plenty to think about. It was all very well to get invitations to one grand party after another, and it was very kind of Aunt Phillis to let her go to so many, and have such pretty dresses for them ; and it was pleasant enough to talk about these things, and to talk about Alec too, in an easy, off-hand sort of manner, when Aunt Phillis and Marian Govan were there to hear ; but, after all, there was nothing like thinking about him quietly to herself, when nobody knew anything about it. She had no joy half so bright as trying to picture his coming back, wondering what he would say, and how he would look, and what he would think about her, and how happy she would be when she had found out that he was indeed the same—not one bit changed in any way, except that

perhaps he might like her better, now that she had grown so much prettier than she used to be when she was only a school-girl.

For Roda never prized that loveliness, of which many a longing glance assured her now, half so much as when she thought that it might make her more pleasing to Alec. True, there was a certain sweetness in being courted and flattered as she had been ever since she came out into society. There was a natural, and perhaps not altogether unjustifiable, triumph in the thought that she could win, by the simple charm of her face and manner, what others failed to command by all their fashionable arts and wiles. It was rather pleasant, after such a very quiet, secluded life as hers had been, to emerge all at once into popularity—to move about like a little queen in the midst of her admirers, and to see so many gay cavaliers

hovering round her, willing to do almost anything for a smile from the reigning belle of the evening. And perhaps Miss Roda, in the young unchastened pride of her beauty, did not prize this homage less because others would fain have appropriated it. She might have lost just a little of that girlish innocence, which, six months ago, made her so glad to listen to Mr. Fabian's pretty speeches, because none but herself could hear them. It did not spoil them now, as it would have spoiled them then, to have them said to her within hearing of half a dozen envious belles, who considered every word spoken to her as so much taken from their own meed of popularity. A very little of the atmosphere of fashionable life is needed to dim the brightness of that yet untouched simplicity with which a young girl enters it for the first time ; and Roda now was

learning to prize her triumph because it *was* a triumph, won from others who would fain have achieved it for themselves.

In doing this she did but reveal her own share of that selfish taint which mars so many an else fair and noble nature. She was only practising in her little circumscribed sphere, what others, with larger knowledge of the world, and more experience of its ways, scarcely think it worth their trouble to conceal. The sweet happiness of success for its own sake had begun to pale before the pride of triumph over others, which that success involved. The candidate who has been elected without a contest wears his honours much more modestly than he who sees behind him on the hustings a cluster of disappointed and chagrined aspirants to the victory which he has borne away from them. And though, of course, he

professes to be very sorry for their failure, and though he lavishes upon them much more blandly-expressed good-will than they at all care to take from him, still it is a question open to discussion, whether that very defeat of theirs, and the very mortification written upon their faces, has not a little—perhaps more than a little—to do with the courtesy and good-will so conspicuous upon his own. At any rate, as public morality in high places goes, he is a very exceptional case of pure-mindedness, if, before the tribunal of his own conscience, he can plead not guilty to the accusing whisper. And as not his own success, but the defeat of another, completes the joy of the favoured candidate, so it is not their loss, so much as the gain of another reaped from that loss, which puts the bitterest taste into the cup of those who find themselves conquered and triumphed over.

Perhaps it was Roda's gaily worn popularity which procured her so many lofty looks from the other young ladies, who thought they had as good a right to be popular as herself. Perhaps it was those same lofty looks, hinting as they did of humiliation and defeat, which made her receive the homage of her admirers with a deeper thrill of pleasure. It was the very kindliness of her bearing towards them which aggravated their mortification ; it was that very mortification which heightened her consciousness of triumph. Roda had not learned that, in the contest for social pre-eminence, no candidate keeps the victory long. The parliament of fashionable life is continually being dissolved, and every dissolution brings a fresh election, in which few of the former members are ever returned again. They must fall back into the ranks of common-place mediocrity, or, contest-

ing their position, have it won from them, and find themselves on the back seats of the hustings, helping in their turn to swell the triumph of others, as once the humiliation of chagrined opponents had enhanced the brilliance of their own victory. Roda would have to come to the knowledge of this truth, as many others have learned it, by painful experience. She would have to see a little more of the world, and get a few rubs of disappointed pride herself, and perhaps a frosty touch or two of neglect from those who waited upon her so diligently now, before she learned to bear her honours with becoming humility, and to say of her garden of beauty what the poet said of that other garden of his—

“I would the sun should shine
On all men's fruits and flowers, as well as mine.”

Nay, to go even further, and grieve that, shining upon hers, it did not also shine on all around.

CHAPTER XV.

THE Deanery party was a much more brilliant gathering than any of the other Christmas festivities which Roda had been privileged to attend. It was, in fact, the official culmination of the Close gaieties ; the preceding entertainments, from Mrs. Dexter's elegant little quadrille party, and the resident canon's "small and early," and the chancellor's musical gathering, forming an ascending scale of splendour, which, in Mrs. Falconer's ball, attained its meridian altitude.

Roda enjoyed it more than any of the others, too ; partly, perhaps, because of that happy hope

which would so soon become a happier reality, and partly because by this time she had learned to feel more at home in gay society, to take her place there with more ease and confidence, knowing that she need not fear adverse criticism. At Mrs. Dexter's party, and at the Canon's periodical crush, which, though denominated "small and early," was in reality quite the reverse, being late and crowded, she had felt just a little touch of nervousness, which—though for a young and beautiful girl, taking her first glance into the world, might be rather fascinating than awkward—still marred the complete enjoyment with which she would otherwise have looked upon her new and unaccustomed surroundings. She was even at a greater disadvantage in this respect than most other girls, for her own quiet life at home, unvaried as yet by anything more brilliant than a muffin-worry

for the Close ladies, or a very select dinner given by her papa to a few of his gentlemen friends, had afforded her no opportunity of gradually feeling her way into fashionable life, and getting familiar by degrees with its manners and customs. She had not been without a little fear lest she should not do everything quite correctly, lest an occasional slip or mistake should give the more experienced belles of past seasons the opportunity of saying,

“Poor girl! we must make allowances for her. You know she has never been accustomed to this sort of thing!”

Now she was beginning to get the better of her shyness. And with the ease of growing confidence, her power to charm increased. For after all, a woman, or girl either, never succeeds in society until she has learned to believe in herself, until she has such faith in her own peculiar

gifts, whatever they may be, that she no longer needs to supplement them by borrowed graces, or cares to put off her own natural style for the sake of appearing in another by which its lawful possessor has achieved popularity. When a woman has given over anxiously, solicitously endeavouring to please, and assumes it as an acknowledged fact that she *does* please, then her success begins. It is not the girl who is for ever wondering what she shall do, or how she shall behave, and studying other girls to find out in what way they contrive to win attention, who becomes a favourite in society; but the girl who takes it for granted, from the very beginning, that she *is* a favourite, and acts accordingly, casting away from her all constraint and anxiety, treading as if she trod upon firm ground, showing in all her manner and bearing that supreme ease and confidence which never

fail to charm, because they assume, whether justly or not is of little consequence, the possession of something which has the power to charm.

Almost the only thing that would seem to be essential in the struggle for social leadership is confidence. With it the most slenderly-gifted girl is continually seen pushing her way to popularity, winning smiles and flattery and caresses. Without it almost every other gift shrinks into the background, is jostled into hopeless obscurity. It is the same with a woman's little fight for social pre-eminence as with men's greater conflict for place and leadership in the ranks of political or municipal influence. Those whose easy confident manner assumes that they have something to give, that they have power to sustain that which they seek to win, will always find others ready to take them upon their

own representation; while those who are careful to get something worth giving before they give it, who labour patiently to deserve influence, and come forward hesitatingly to assume it, even when it is their right, find themselves hustled back by the finer tact of their self-confident opponents into the crowd of unacknowledged nonentities.

It is a woman's happy consciousness of power to charm which gives her true success. If she is too slenderly gifted with self-esteem ever to achieve that consciousness, or, achieving it, to assert it in the joyous ease and unrestraint of self-confidence, she must be content to remain forever in the background of society. Shy, modest, reserved, she will never get what it only gives to those who come boldly forward to claim their rights. Beauty itself, that most royal attribute of supremacy, will fail to crown the woman who

is too diffident to make other people know that she feels herself beautiful; whilst even plainness has been bowed down to, when the possessor of that plainness has been endowed with self-esteem enough to bring out her other gifts, and demand for them their due amount of appreciation.

Roda was not conceited, but she had just enough self-esteem to save her from the misery of constant doubt about her own position. And she had been long enough now in the gay world, and had received sufficient incense of flattery there, to assure her of her position, to enable her to take it and sustain herself in it without fear of mistake or failure. She had just so much confidence in herself that she did not care to copy from anyone else; she had just enough consciousness of her own fascinations to give a happy freedom and *abandon* to all her ways;

and, not losing yet the charm of girlishness, adding to it that innocent self-possession which makes it almost irresistible.

Of course the Deanery party brought a repetition of the flattering homage which had so greatly enhanced the pleasantness of its predecessors. Mr. Fabian was there; Mrs. Dexter had assured herself that he would be able to act as their escort, before she offered to relieve Miss Chickory from the fatigue and excitement of acting as *chaperone* to her young niece, by taking that office upon herself. The handsome young curate had spared no pains in cultivating his acquaintance with Roda, and so marked had his attentions become since he had had the opportunity of paying them in public, that the ladies of the Close, who were by no means destitute of the usual feminine taste for discussing matrimonial possibilities, had more than once playfully

rallied the rising belle upon her conquest, and had even gone so far as to drop a playful inuendo now and then to Mr. Fabian himself, when they chanced to meet him, in company with Aunt Phillis and Mrs. Dexter, with Dr. Montagu's fair daughter leaning on his arm.

Roda only laughed merrily, and turned the whole affair into a joke, when any of her young friends congratulated her upon the possession of the Rev. Marcus Fabian's affections. She was quite willing, she said, to resign that honour to anyone who would prize it more highly than she was disposed to do ; and perhaps sometimes she availed herself of a woman's privilege to use a little innocent prevarication when the questions became too pointed ; and the Miss Ducanons, or Miss Ethel Brooke, or even the elaborate Miss Lesbanks herself, who could descend to a little catechising when it suited her purpose,

asserted that Mr. Fabian's attentions were becoming quite too pointed now for anyone to mistake what he meant. Was it not quite true that he had escorted her home from nearly all the Close parties that season, and that he had taken such a wonderful fancy to playing chess with Dr. Montagu lately, for the sake of spending his evenings at the Old Deanery; and did Roda suppose they did not know what all that sort of thing meant? Oh! no, she need not blush and deny it. It was all very well to make a joke of it, and say there was nothing in it; young ladies always did say so, when they were taxed with having made a conquest; but everyone was talking about it, and saying how completely Mr. Fabian had lost his heart; and they had even heard one or two people say when the wedding was to be, so Miss Montagu need not deny it.

Miss Montagu did deny it, though, but with that pretty look of conscious guilt which is generally supposed to give the lie to any such little ineffectual prevarications. The truth was, she rather rejoiced in her power over Mr. Fabian. She liked to feel that she was singled out by him as an object of flattery and compliment, which the young ladies who catechised her would fain have had spent upon themselves. It was very new and sweet to her, this sense of being envied by those who had been accustomed to rule. And though she did not care for Mr. Fabian, and though a sort of womanly instinct within her told her that he did not care for her, as a man cares for the woman he would choose out of all the world for his wife ; still, she did not like to come down from the pinnacle on which his preference appeared to place her. That preference might cost her dear before she had done

with it, but it was very pleasant now, and still pleasanter because she had won it by her beauty from those who could not win it by their arts and wiles.

Still, all this badinage brought a sort of shy reserve into her manner with Mr. Fabian, and sometimes a flush to her cheeks when he was talking to her so very impressively. And she had begun to draw herself away from him now with a maidenly coyness, which society always pounces upon as the first indication of "something serious." After that coyness had once been observed in Roda's manner towards the handsome young curate of St. Chad's, the Close ladies knew well enough what was going to come of it. No need to tell *them* anything more. They could divine all the rest for themselves.

Mrs. Dexter noticed this with satisfaction,

as an augury of success for her plans. She was not at all displeased when these little flying snatches of gossip began to reach her own ears. She did not bridle up with sisterly indignation and protest that it was nothing but the merest friendliness, just a harmless preference, nothing more, when one and another of her friends remarked upon the interesting relations which appeared likely to spring up by-and-by between her brother and Dr. Montagu's pretty young daughter. She never took any notice of these things, she said, carelessly.

She always thought young people were best left to themselves, and allowed to manage their own love affairs, if they had any to manage. Her brother was a great admirer of beauty, particularly Miss Montagu's style of beauty, and perhaps it would only end in smoke after all. Still, Roda Montagu was an exquisite little

creature, quite irresistible, and it would not surprise her in the least if Marcus did get entangled, before he knew what he was doing ; and really, on the whole, if it did come to anything——

There Mrs. Dexter generally stopped, as though it were a matter of the most absolute indifference to herself if it did not come to anything ; but yet if it did, she should not feel called upon to grieve over such a conclusion of the matter as an unmitigated evil. Also, that Marcus had the disposal of events entirely in his own hands, so that if the whole affair did finally end in smoke, it would simply be because he did not choose that it should end in anything else.

Still, Mrs. Dexter was far from being annoyed that the Close people had begun to talk about “something serious,” as likely to result

from her brother's admiration of Miss Montagu ; nor even at some hints of the kind having been given to Roda herself. That pretty consciousness which she betrayed now, whenever he paid any special attention, was quite in his favour. At any rate, it showed that she began to understand his meaning. There was never anything of that sort when young Ducannon, or Mr. Sparks, or any of the other gentlemen whom she was in the habit of meeting, hovered around her with their flattering compliments. She seemed to take their attentions as a matter of course, received them in a gay, careless, unembarrassed manner ; they evidently produced no impression upon her, beyond, perhaps, just a passing sensation of triumph, in being able to command them. But the rosy flush in her cheek, and the charming shyness which came over her whenever Marcus was more than

ordinarily impressive, spoke volumes for the progress which he had made, and gave him the most explicit assurance, which, under present circumstances, he could receive of his ultimate success.

Mrs. Dexter thought he might go a little farther now. The time had come now when, without startling the fair object of his regards, he might bring her to consider the probability of something definite being said, and lead her to look upon him in the character of a future lover. Mrs. Dexter had had considerable experience in such matters. She had more than once advised her brother how to order his course in the prosecution of a similar delicate undertaking; and when the prize which he sought had proved unworthy, in a pecuniary sense, of the labour which must be put forth in securing it, she had also instructed him how to

withdraw gracefully from the pursuit, without damaging his own honour, or injuring his chances of success in a new direction. Now, the prize was so valuable that it behoved him to use all skill in the pursuit of it. He had just reached that stage, too, when a little eagerness or over-haste might injure him fatally. It was not well, Mrs. Dexter said, to come to the point too suddenly. Miss Montagu was very young, scarcely able as yet to know her own mind about anything so important as settling in life. If the subject were brought before her suddenly, without any careful preparation, she would most likely hesitate, tremble, and refer it to her papa, who, not supposing that she could have any very strong preferences in the matter, would possibly object on account of her youth, and so Marcus's chances would be gone. But if he could contrive to draw her thoughts to the

subject by degrees, and by a chance word dropped now and then, when he found himself alone with her, suggest the position which he would fain hold in her affections, without as yet binding her by any definite promise, he would unconsciously become the centre of her thoughts ;
* and by accustoming herself to look upon him as one who sought to sustain a close relation to her, she might, when the time came for him boldly to plead his cause, be more prepared to grant it, having already taken it into consideration as the possible issue of his manifest attentions.

Therefore Mrs. Dexter advised her brother to secure a quiet conversation with Roda during the Deanery party ; and then not actually to ask her affections, she being as yet unequal to so serious a decision as that question would involve, but in some unmistakeable way to convey

to her mind the impression that he sought and would be content with nothing less. The opportunity, she said, should not be delayed, or others might advance their claims. She had heard, through Miss Chickory, of young Ianson's return as an event likely to take place before long; and though, from the perfectly careless, indifferent manner in which Roda always spoke of him, she did not think her brother had anything to fear in that direction,—you could always find out, she said, by a young girl's hesitation and awkwardness, whether she was interested in any one,—still it was possible that Mr. Ianson might be disposed to contest the prize. Indeed, it was scarcely possible that a young man of such an impressible nature as Mr. Ianson, from what she had seen of him, appeared to be, could find himself continually thrown into the society of a girl like Roda

Montagu, without serious consequences to his affections. And if he did come forward as a suitor, he would have the advantage of previous acquaintance, besides that of long friendship between the two families, which often turned the scale in a young man's favour, when his own personal qualifications failed to recommend him, or when the attachment on the lady's part was not so strong as to overrule all other motives. Therefore it behoved Marcus to be on the alert, and take the earliest opportunity of so far enlightening Roda with regard to his future intentions, that she might at any rate bring herself to look upon him in the light of a lover. If he could once secure this kind of tacit understanding between them, and by a few more marked attentions give additional colour to the reports which were already afloat, he might, without actually committing himself or the lady either, so far assume

the position of her favoured admirer, as to deter others from aspiring to that honour. The decisive question might then be asked in its own time and place.

Marcus was not backward in availing himself of his opportunities. As everyone said who had the privilege of being present at the Deanery on the occasion of Mrs. Falconer's ball, it was impossible to mistake the devotion of his manner towards Miss Montagu, nor the meaning of that charming shyness with which she received it. Indeed, this devotion was so manifest, that Miss Lesbanks and the Misses Ducannon, and one or two other young ladies who had at various times imagined themselves the objects of Mr. Fabian's preference, determined from that night to renounce their adherence to ritualism, and to identify themselves for the future with St. Eusebius, whose rector

employed a couple of very broad-church curates, or with Mr. Armytage, the leader of the Evangelicals, whose assistants, coming only to read for orders, presented a pleasing variety of selection.

If any further ratification of their suspicions was needed, these ladies received it, when, towards the close of the evening, the Rev. Marcus Fabian came out of the conservatory, looking very happy and triumphant, with Miss Montagu, charmingly shy and conscious, leaning upon his arm. The Miss Ducannons and Miss Lesbanks thought they did not require to be told what that meant. If that was all the curate of St. Chad's could do for those who had decorated his church at all the great festivals, and attended primes, nones, and vespers for him, to the great neglect of pleasanter occupations, and kept his altar supplied with the choicest of

their flowers, and his priestly form decked with the most elaborate of vestments, then it was time for ritualism, so far as they had anything to do with it, to be laid on the shelf.

Miss Lesbanks spent the rest of the evening in mentally considering how she could convert the crimson silk stole, which she had been privately embroidering for the curate of St. Chad's, into the border of a table-cloth.

CHAPTER XVI.

BUT the case was not quite so serious as Miss Lesbanks and the Miss Ducannons imagined. Roda did not issue from those perfumed glades of oleander and laurustinus the affianced bride of the Rev. Marcus Fabian. The colour that came and went so quickly upon her fair cheek was not the flush of happy young love, love scarce daring as yet to acknowledge its own exceeding bliss; nor were those silken-fringed eyelids bent down so modestly to hide the half-tearful joy of hope fulfilled, hope long cherished, brightening into happy certainty at last. Mr. Fabian had only been preparing the

way, according to his sister's recommendation, by a few tender words, fitly spoken, which he hoped might justify him in claiming, at no very distant period, the affections of the fair girl to whom he had addressed them. And also claiming, with those affections, other accessories intimately connected with them, which should greatly advance his temporal interests, and help him to make a much more comfortable thing of life than his present limited income as the curate of St. Chad's provided him with the means of doing.

When the second quadrille was over, he had drawn Roda's arm within his own, and led her away to the conservatory, where, under pretext of sauntering about to enjoy the cool air and the perfume of the flowers, he could accomplish the preliminaries of his suit more favourably than they could be accomplished amidst the hum

and excitement of the dancing. Also, that by conducting her into the drawing-room again in the face of the guests assembled there, he might convey to them the impression that she belonged now in some sort to himself—that, at any rate, there was an understanding between them of something much more than mere friendship.

In this last thing he certainly did succeed ; for after the evening of Mrs. Falconer's ball, the engagement of Mr. Fabian and the pretty Miss Montagu was spoken of by the Close people as an indubitable fact ; and within a few days of his wearing Roda's camellia in his button-hole, which he had done when he came out from the conservatory, half the upper-class young ladies in Ulphusby, who were admirably versed in inductive and deductive philosophy, and could reason from cause to effect, and from effect to cause, as well as any professor of logic in the

colleges, knew when the wedding was to take place, and what the bride was to have for her fortune, and where they were to live, and how many servants they would be able to keep.

Mr. Fabian had been very skilful. Without startling Roda by any sudden and unprepared-for declaration of his attachment, he had given her to understand that her love was exceedingly precious to him, and that he hoped at some time to win and wear it as the crowning treasure of his life. At least, just so much of that fact as his spoken words failed to imply, the gentle pressure of his hand, and the lingering sweet tones of his voice, had unmistakeably supplied. And Roda, young as she was, had yet perception enough to divine the unspoken meaning of that language.

It filled her now with a new strange unrest, very different from the gay, happy triumph with

which she had listened to many a compliment before. They only increased that sense of power which is the charm of a beautiful girl's social life. Her eyes had sparkled, and her lip had curled into a rosy smile as she heard them, and it had been an amusement to remember them afterwards; just as, when a little child, she had counted the flowers in her garden, or the gilded toys in her play-room. But she felt as if she could not laugh at this, nor turn it aside with light, careless pleasantry, giving back smile for smile, jest for jest. It seemed to lift the curtain for her from a life which she had never thought about as yet. It did not reach down and touch her heart with the infinite sweetness of love there, but it made her start and tremble with the consciousness of another's love, a love which she had never thought of, for which she

had no reply, knocking at the door of her heart, seeking for admittance there. It is a beautiful and a happy thing for a woman to feel within herself the power to charm; but the power to win love, when first it reveals itself, comes to the true heart with a strange and almost awful surprise. Roda could not speak. She could but look away from those eyes, which she felt, rather than saw, were searching her own, and blush and tremble, and nervously play with the flowers which she held in her disengaged hand, and show by her confused manner how deeply the words had stirred her.

Just as Mr. Fabian meant that she should do. He had said things of that kind, though of course not quite so serious and earnest—for, to do him justice, he was not exactly a flirt—to several young ladies before, to some in that

very conservatory, under the shadow of that same orange-tree whose white blossoms were dropping upon Roda's head now, and symbolizing for him another wreath, which, standing by his side, she should one day wear. With his own handsome face quite unmoved, he had watched how theirs flushed and paled; and with his own hand steady, he had felt the tremor of theirs as it rested on his arm. But that had only been a pretty little amusement—just a harmless pastime; because, if girls would set upon him so, and make their wishes so very manifest, he could not help humouring them now and then, and going a little farther perhaps than was absolutely prudent, to avoid being thought churlish and unsusceptible.

Besides, Mr. Fabian wanted vestments. He wanted stoles and chasubles, and albs and maniples and girdles. He wanted altar-cloths

embroidered ; he wanted the church of St. Chad's decorated from time to time, according to the season ; and he knew how far such delightful little *tête-à-têtes* as he could afford to bestow upon the Close young ladies, went towards the supply of these wants. Experience had taught him how many gentle hand-pressures would secure a gold-fringed stole, and how many a fully-embroidered one ; how many turns he must take up and down that conservatory, and how many graceful compliments he must pay for a satin chasuble ; how many gentle looks would supply the lilies for Whittide decorations, and to what extent he must go in flattering the young ladies who cast themselves upon his sympathies, before he could calculate upon the altar being sufficiently furnished with the flowers suitable for Easter. Mr. Fabian could estimate his chances of profit and loss in such

transactions as these, and arrange his behaviour accordingly, with as much accuracy as a merchant accommodates himself to the fluctuations of the markets, or a captain to the variations in the compass.

But he expected something more costly than even ecclesiastical vestments, or the most elaborate of church decorations, from this offering which he was now making. It was of great importance to him that it should be favourably received; and the flushing cheek, and the down-cast eye, and the little trembling hand seemed to say that it *was* favourably received. It was better, much better, that Roda should appear nervous and confused and ill at ease, than that she should look up frankly into his face and turn the whole affair into a joke, as she sometimes used to do when he ventured upon tenderness with her; much better than if she

had seemed perfectly calm and self-possessed, and taken it as a mere matter of course, as he had noticed her receive young Mr. Sparks's flatteries, or Hubert Ducannon's carefully prepared speeches. Mr. Fabian hoped for everything from that downcast face, those nervously trembling hands. They told him of a heart responding to the touch of his tender words; they told him of a triumphant issue to his cherished plans; they told him of a comfortable pecuniary competence, and a snug living waiting for him in the gift of the head-master of Ulphusby Grammar School, and a commodious home, perhaps the Old Deanery itself, presided over at no very distant time by this fair young girl, who stood beside him now, embarrassed and ill at ease for words which he had spoken to her.

Roda turned as though to leave him there, still restlessly playing with her bouquet, which

she had now almost destroyed. Mr. Fabian took it gently from her, and began to re-arrange it ; but before he gave it back to her he abstracted a half-opened white camellia.

“You must let me keep this,” he said, “for a memory of the sweetest hour of my life. And I shall wear it as proudly as I may perhaps some day wear a sweeter gift.”

So saying, he placed it in his button-hole, and then led Roda back to the drawing-room, looking, as we have said before, very happy and triumphant—so exceedingly happy and triumphant, that all the ladies who pretended to anything like expertness in inductive philosophy, knew at once that something important had transpired ; in short, that an engagement had been accomplished in the Close.

They were still more confirmed in this opinion an hour or two afterwards, when Mr.

Fabian led Roda to the carriage, Mrs. Dexter following with the Dean himself. He wrapped her up very carefully, spending a most unnecessary length of time in seeing that her little pink cashmere hood was properly arranged, as Miss Lesbanks, who, unesquipped, was robing herself in a huge fur-lined opera mantle, noticed with ill-concealed asperity. And then he placed her in the carriage, taking his seat opposite, whilst Mrs. Dexter, under the auspices of the Dean, was tucked up in her own proper draperies.

“A settled thing, of course,” said Miss Lesbanks to herself, as the footman called her carriage, and a fussy old married gentleman, all cough and puff, helped her to stuff her flounces into it—“a settled thing, of course, now that he waits upon her in this public way. I wonder whatever he can see in the girl

beyond her pretty face and fortune. But some men are so pitifully stupid!"

And up went the Lesbanks' nose, and down went the corners of the Lesbanks' mouth, and away went the Lesbanks' chariot to its destination in the College Gardens, arriving there just as Mr. Fabian was assisting Roda to alight at the door of the Old Deanery.

He gave her his arm across the hall as far as the drawing-room, when Aunt Phillis came to meet them. But before he consigned her to the care of that lady, he managed to find opportunity for a few whispered words, and a long clasp of her hand, which brought the uncertain colour to Roda's face again, and made her eyes seek the ground.

"Why, Roda, is that you? Who would have thought it?"

Roda lifted up her eyes, and snatching her hand away from Mr. Fabian's, found herself face to face with Alec Ianson.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.





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